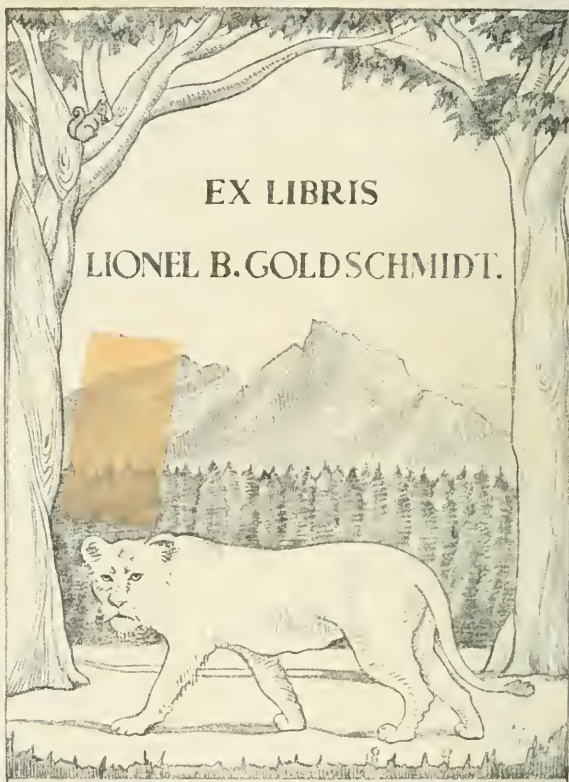


THE BREATH OF THE KARROO

BY L. H. BRINKMAN

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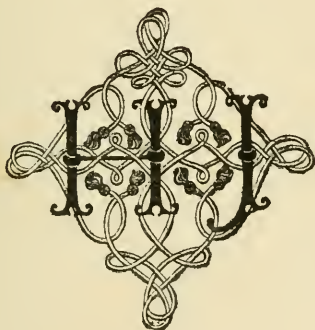
THE
BREATH
OF THE
KARROO



THE BREATH OF THE KARROO

A STORY OF BOER LIFE
IN THE SEVENTIES

BY
L. H. BRINKMAN



HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED
ARUNDEL PLACE, HAYMARKET
LONDON, S.W. ⌘ ⌘ MCMXIV

LONDON AND NORWICH PRESS, LIMITED, LONDON AND NORWICH

PREFACE

WHATEVER might be said of the old Dutch Boer, South Africa owes him a debt of gratitude. Born in the veld, his wants were few and easily satisfied. Accustomed to hardships from the cradle, he was eminently suited to pioneer civilisation into waste deserts, by overcoming dangers and conditions requiring the most strenuous and persistent perseverance, and the sacrifice of every comfort and social intercourse that made life worth living.

Crude as the Boer was in method and wanting in education, his very name became a synonym for uncouthness. Yet, in spite of all drawbacks, he literally ploughed his way through innumerable dangers, trials and vicissitudes, gaining ground and strength in his onward career, until he was able to bequeath to the generations yet unborn the magnificent legacy of a country, a home, purged from depopulating evils, responding abundantly to the husbandry of the agriculturist and stock farmer.

Where formerly the caves of savages and the

dens of the carnivoræ lurked in lonely deserts, chapels and schools now proudly rear their heads as fit monuments to the pioneer blood shed to clear the way for their advent.

His fights with Kaffir tribes have been chronicled ; his bravery in war recorded, but who can tell of the many daily evils that the old Boer had to meet and vanquish in the seclusion of his farm ?

The Boer's struggle with the thieving, treacherous Bushman was a long and tedious one, to overcome whom many a heartbreak had to be endured, as wife or child or husband, and sometimes a whole family, was cruelly murdered.

The story in the following pages, based upon facts taken from real life, as narrated to the author by an old Boer, is only a peep at one of the many incidents which led up to the final doom of the Bushmen in the Karroo.

Looking back upon his past struggles with savages and wild beasts, and counting the price paid by his ancestors in blood and tears for the land he calls " Home," who can wonder at the indomitable spirit of independence which forces the Boer to resent, even to the point of war, all interference in his domestic government of the land he so dearly acquired ?

The feud between Briton and Boer is now over, after a fight so marked by bravery on both sides that each learned to respect the other, and the conquering Briton, with a policy of magnanimity that astounded the world, has handed over to the Boer the management of his own affairs.

The wisdom and brilliancy of statesmanship displayed in that trust in a great measure repays the debt due to the old pioneer Boer, and not only redounds to the eternal honour of England, but serves as a model for all other nations, who recognize it as an epoch in the revolutionary progress of the world.

L. H. B.

QUEENSTOWN,
SOUTH AFRICA.

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THE BREATH OF THE KARROO

CHAPTER I

TANTE LET

“**H**EAVENS, Gijs ! Whatever have you got there ? ”

Gijs made no reply, but lifted from the cart two small brown objects looking for all the world like new-born baby monkeys, and carefully deposited them on the stoep before his mother. There was no occasion to explain the nature of the little creatures, for they set up such a howl, and at the same time displayed their limbs so ostentatiously, kicking in protest of their grievances, that the fact was apparent to anybody that they belonged to the *genus homo*.

“Two little Bushmen ! Where did you get them, and what are you going to do with them ? ” A frown was gathering on Tante Let’s forehead.

“I found them in the veld under a krantz, and the poor things looked so deserted and cold that I took pity on them. I thought we might domesticate them and bring them up as servants.”

Indeed, they did look pathetic atoms, with not a scrap of clothing to hide their helpless nudity.

And the ground was still damp with the previous night's frost.

"Gijs, you must take them back at once. I do not want them on the farm. You know what Bushmen are. As soon as the parents discover that you have robbed them of their children, they will murder us all in time."

"But, mother, everybody hereabouts is catching and taming young Bushmen, and you don't hear of their parents worrying much. I think they are jolly glad to get rid of the little encumbrances."

Tante Let would not hear of it, and she was gradually becoming angry with her son for persisting in the madness, as she called it, of trying to keep and domesticate Bushmen. In her opinion domesticating the Bushman simply meant changing his nature from natural savagery into cunning treachery.

Gijs saw that there was nothing for it but to take them back again to the krantz, and accordingly he replaced the still-screaming babies in the cart and drove them back in the direction he had come.

Tante Let watched her son driving away, and remained on the stoep for a considerable time, staring into vacancy, her features assuming that pensive look that comes over the face when the soul, conjuring up long-gone scenes, sad or happy, according to the mood of the thinker, communes with itself.

Her husband, Gijsbert Uijs, had left her early in life: and her widowhood, fraught as it was with the manifold worries of existence on a farm, the bringing up of her two sons—one of whom was a mere

suckling when their father died—and the hard struggle to keep things going, had somewhat hardened her nature, and given her a peculiar harshness of manner and speech.

In spite of this, however, she possessed many sterling qualities, and, as far as she was known, was not only respected, but loved. In times of sickness or want she was the one first appealed to, for she would sympathise and help to the utmost of her power, it being the principal tenet in her religion that each is, to a great extent, the keeper of his brother, and that one must first succour others, before asking help from heaven.

Neighbours living at great distances would send for her to come to some sick person, and mile after mile would she travel in response to such a summons. Meanwhile, those at the farm who needed her assistance would impatiently watch the road for the return of the cart sent to meet her, and when at last it made its appearance in the distance, the anxious one would be inspired by sudden hope, as the magic words were whispered: "The cart is coming."

When Tante Let entered a sick-room, every one felt that a strong and helpful spirit was at hand, and the invalid would take comfort; for it was well known that Tante Let never gave up hope whilst life remained.

Only those who live far away from towns with their doctors and stores of patent medicines, know the true worth of such a woman as Tante Let. Many were the stories told of lives snatched from the very grave by her perseverance, and of the

wonderful efficacy of her home remedies. Life was a strenuous business as she understood it, and, although at heart the kindest and most sympathetic of helpers, Tante Let had become somewhat querulous and abrupt in manner.

To the whole countryside she was known as "Tante Let." No one would ever have dreamed of calling her "Mrs. Uijs," and had anybody done so, she would have put him down as "uppish," and have treated him with scant courtesy.

The words "tante," meaning "aunt," and "oom," meaning "uncle," are still used by the young Dutch as a mark of respect when addressing their elders.

A young Dutchman or girl addressing an elder invariably does so by the Christian name, omitting the surname, and prefixing either "tante" or "oom," and to the uninitiated it sounds odd to hear a young man on being introduced to people who are perfect strangers to him, greet them so familiarly. The elders, in turn, address the younger men as "neef," and young girls as "nicht," both terms meaning "cousin," a friendly method which tends to banish formality and put every one at ease.

As Tante Let was sitting on the stoep, many thoughts crowded through her mind, and it could be plainly seen that she was uneasy from some cause or other. She felt lonely and forsaken, and often said that since the death of her husband she had never known what real company meant. Although many of the neighbours came to see her, she felt at times the need of some strong, responsive heart to whom she could unbosom herself.

Life had become a serious matter, with a multi-

tude of duties to be discharged, and promised very little in return. It was twelve years since she had lost her husband, and with him went all her pleasure in life. She lived now for her two sons, and loved them so deeply that she often rebuked herself for verging perilously near idolizing them, and in consequence incurring the displeasure of heaven.

Her elder son Gijsbert, named after his father, gradually took the responsibility of the farm from her shoulders. He was a strong, sturdy young man, with all the good nature of his mother. Although only in his twentieth year, he had already displayed such daring and bravery in times of danger, that his neighbours nicknamed him "David," a name bestowed upon him in the first instance after an encounter with Bushmen, in which Gijs had showed such utter indifference to their poisoned arrows that he had routed the gang from their hiding-place, single-handed.

Quiet and retiring, he belonged to that class of young men who have little to say for themselves, and, in the company of women, are most uncomfortably shy. When, however, serious business was on hand, such as tries the mettle of men, the young Boer had a habit of pushing himself to the front and taking any risk that might arise. In an unobtrusive manner he had gradually taken the place of his father in the management of domestic affairs, and Tante Let never did anything of importance without first consulting him on the matter.

His brother Piet was still too much of a child to be of any real assistance on the farm—being only thirteen years old, but he made himself generally

useful and was specially occupied in tending the flock of sheep and looking after the lambs on the werf.

Tante Let's reverie was interrupted by Piet, who came out of the house dangling a huge tortoise at the end of a string.

"Mother, are you going to Nachtmaal? I heard Jantje say that you and Gijs would be going, and that he and I will manage the farm?"

"Yes; I think so. Why?"

"If you go, will you buy me some gunpowder and lead, and a clasp knife? The old knife Jantje gave me is so blunt that it won't cut a riem, even after I have sharpened it."

"I will see, but you want some clothing badly, and I have to buy so many things for the farm that I can make no promise."

"You know, mother, eight of the skins you are taking belong to me, and if you sell them there will be more than enough to pay for what I want. With the rest you can buy yourself a new Sunday dress."

"Thank you, child," said Tante Let, taking his face between her hands and kissing him passionately.

"And when you go, may I ask Japie to stay with me? I will be so lonely."

"We have made no arrangements yet, Piet. When Gijs comes we can talk the matter over, but I will not leave you here alone."

Satisfied, Piet hurried off to some lambs at the kraal, dragging his tortoise after him.

Going to Nachtmaal is the great event in Boer life.

In the year 1870 there were very few towns or villages in the Karroo, and often a journey of two or three days' duration had to be undertaken to reach the nearest town boasting a church and a minister. Consequently many communicants, on account of the great distance from the church, could only partake of *Nachtmaal*—the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper—once a year, and often, through stress of circumstances, two or three years elapsed before the sacred privilege could be indulged in.

The event being so rare, great preparations were made, for going to *Nachtmaal* did not only mean going to church, but the transaction of a number of things of a temporal nature as well.

Sterkfontein, Tante Let's farm, in common with all Karroo farms, consisted of extensive plains of Karroo bush, a low scraggy shrub, seldom more than eighteen inches high, but very fattening and sustaining for sheep. Here and there a few kopjes relieved the monotony of the view, and every few miles, randjes, or low stony hills, stretched across the plains. Except for an occasional patch of thorn bush, there were no trees as far as the eye could reach. The homestead, or *werf*, however, formed an oasis in this desert; and it is surprising to note how luxuriantly trees of any description will grow in the Karroo, if properly attended to and regularly watered.

Sterkfontein, as the name implies, was the envied possessor of a strong fountain, and consequently the homestead had a beautiful garden and lands, from which not only the farm itself, but also many less

privileged neighbouring farms, were supplied with wheat and forage.

The dwelling-house was very disappointing. The walls were low, barely nine feet in height, surmounted by an old thatched roof, showing signs of decay; the windows were all very small and of the kind that opens on hinges, protected by crude wooden shutters opening outwards. The doors were in two parts, divided horizontally, in such a manner that the top part could be opened while the bottom remained closed.

These doors were not only picturesque but indispensable, as, by keeping the lower door closed, and the top one open, they afforded a free outlook from the inside of the house, whilst chickens, dogs, pigs, and other animated appurtenances incidental to a farm were shut out.

The roughly plastered mud walls, innocent of whitewash or artistic workmanship, were well in keeping with the apology for a stoep, which was merely a slight elevation covered with flat slabs of sandstone.

The Dutch Boer, however, never makes the mistake of judging a farm by the appearance of the house built upon it, or the number of outhouses. A farm's value is regulated by its water supply, and the extent of arable land and farming conveniences, such as kraals, sheds and stables.

Sterkfontein possessed all the necessary qualifications of a good Karroo farm, and was accordingly coveted by all who thought they could afford to buy it. No matter how good the offer was Tante Let would not sell, as by the terms of her husband's

will the farm had to go to the two sons in equal shares.

Jan Brandt, her nearest neighbour, had offered Tante Let two farms in exchange for Sterkfontein, trying to tempt her with the argument that she would thus be enabled to leave each of her sons a farm for himself. But, even if her husband's will had not placed this beyond her power, she would not have accepted the exchange, for Sterkfontein contained what was to her sacred—her husband's grave.

Tante Let was still sitting on the stoep when Gijs returned from the veld. Jantje, the old Hottentot servant, was ready to take the horses as they were outspanned.

Gijs strolled up to his mother and sat down on the bench beside her. "I returned the little Bushmen to their lair, and found that their parents had been there since I took the babies this morning, for I saw their spoor. I do not like these Bushmen prowling about the farm, they are such thieves. We shall have to do something to chase them away."

"What is the use? You drive them off to-day, and to-morrow they return and steal your best ox." Tante Let dismissed the subject with a wave of her hand. "I am thinking of going to Nachtmaal," she continued after a silence. "It is two years since we last saw the inside of a church, and we cannot continue to live like heathens. Jan Brandt told me that there will be three ministers officiating, so that it will be worth while."

"When will Nachtmaal be, mother?"

"The first Sunday in February, so we have only

two weeks in which to prepare for it. Brandt and his family are going, and he wants to know whether we will go in one party."

"I suppose you will take Piet with you?"

"I should dearly like to do so, as the child has never seen a dorp yet, and it would be an experience for him, but you will have to go, too, as the quit-rent must be paid, and all the skins sold. Brandt has offered to send Van der Vyver over to stop here whilst we are gone."

"In that case, mother, I will go over to Oom Jan to-morrow, and see what arrangements they are making."

A rumbling of wheels interrupted the conversation, and a moment later a cart drove up to the front door. A young man alighted and handed the reins to a Hottentot boy, who hurried forward with a smile of recognition. The young man walked to the stoep shouting to Gijs: "Here you are, sitting down all the time, you lazy dog! I have not seen you for three days, and have come to see what's amiss. Good-morning, Tante."

He shook hands with Gijs, and kissed Tante Let in a way that showed how frequent a visitor he was.

"How are all at home, Wijnand?" asked Tante Let.

"All well, thank you, Tante. Mother sends regards."

"I intended going over to see you to-morrow," said Gijs, "to find out what arrangements have been made for going to Nachtmaal."

"You had better outspan and stop here for dinner, Wijnand," interposed Tante Let.

Gijs shouted for Jantje and ordered him to outspan the horses, and attend to them. Tante Let went indoors to prepare the meal, leaving the two young men on the stoep.

Wijnand was the eldest son of Jan Brandt, of Boshoeck, the nearest farm to Sterkfontein. He had a bright, cheery disposition, and, unlike Gijs, was rather loquacious. One of those lucky individuals who have something to talk about at all times, he could make a commonplace topic interesting, and there was an air of friendliness about him that seemed to infect those in whose company he might be. Tall and handsome, with a thick crop of black, curly hair, his personal appearance attracted as well as his manner. Gijs was only of medium height, fair, and though decidedly good-looking, lost greatly in comparison with Wijnand.

Gijs, however, was far the braver and more daring of the two, and would venture on deeds that would make Wijnand pause. The latter was not by any means pusillanimous, but was extremely cautious. In the society of women Wijnand was easily first favourite, not only on account of his personal attractions, but because he had the happy knack of keeping every one amused and interested.

Between these two youths a very great friendship had existed since childhood. Whenever they met they were inseparable. Each had the other's perfect confidence, and was the safe depository of secrets. As they grew up their love grew stronger, and no one had ever heard of a quarrel or misunderstanding between them.

Just as Gijs was nicknamed David, so Wijnand was

expected to answer to Jonathan, and seldom were they addressed by their proper names. Often on meeting strangers they were introduced as David and Jonathan, but all this banter never caused ill-feeling, or provoked any resentment.

"How is it that you have not been over to Boshhoek lately? I thought there might be something wrong," said Wijnand.

"How could that be? Did I not fire one shot every morning?"

"Yes; but I am so used to seeing you every day that I became quite alarmed."

It was the custom of these two every morning to greet each other by firing a shot which could be plainly heard from farm to farm. Punctually at sunrise Gijs would take his gun and go a short distance from the house, on to a little rise from whence Boshhoek could be seen. If all was well he fired one shot, which was promptly replied to by Wijnand. Should any one be sick, or something extraordinary have happened, he would fire two shots, and if help were required in any emergency, three; the effect of which was that, within half an hour, some one from Boshhoek would be on the spot, and *vice versa*.

"Mother was just saying that she is going to Nachtsmaal next month, and wants me to go with her. Are you going?" asked Gijs.

"We have not yet decided. But if you have made up your mind to go I will ask father to take me also. He mentioned that he had promised Tante Let to allow Van der Vyver and his wife to come over to Sterkfontein whilst she is away."

“ The whole neighbourhood seems to be going. We shall be quite a caravan.”

“ Yes,” laughed Wijnand, “ and won’t we make the old folks lively along the road ! Nachtmaal in town is the grandest time one can have. I do look forward to it.”

CHAPTER II

THE POISON DOCTOR

ON the third day after Wijnand's visit, whilst the Uijs family were sitting at dinner, Koek, one of the young Hottentot servants on the farm, peered through the door connecting the kitchen with the dining-room, and called out, "Ou nooi," as though fearing he might be reprimanded for disturbing the diners.

"Ou nooi" is a term used by servants in addressing an old lady, and is equivalent to the English "Missus." Literally translated it means "Old maid," but by common usage among the Dutch it has lost that meaning. In referring to an old maid the Dutch make use of the expression "Ou jong nooi,"—old young maid. Servants speaking to a young lady say "Klein nooi," little maid. Similarly, the master of the house is addressed as "Ou baas" and a young man, "Klein baas."

Tante Let, who was sitting with her back towards the door, turned round, and saw Koek standing timidly on the threshold.

It was an unpardonable offence for any one of the younger servants to intrude into the dining-room whilst the family sat at table, and Tante Let knew that Koek must have something very important to

communicate or he would not penetrate the forbidden region.

"What is the matter, Koek?" she asked, sternly.

"I have just returned from the veld, Ou Nooi. On the way I looked in at the place where Baas Gijs placed the little Bushmen, and"—his voice faltered—"I found them still there!"

"Well, you stupid, that is where they should be," answered Tante Let with an amused smile.

"Did you expect them to run away?"

"But they are both dead, Ou Nooi!" said Koek, solemnly, assuming the guiltless air of the Hottentot who means you to understand at once that he is in no way to blame for the misfortune.

"Dead!" exclaimed the whole family in unison.

"Yes, Ou Nooi, and some wild beasts have partly devoured them."

"All right, Koek. You can go!" The boy vanished at once, and closed the door softly behind him.

"I noticed," said Gijs, "that the Bushmen had been to the spot during the interval in which I had the babies away. Evidently they thought that the children would never be returned, so did not go back to see."

"They thought right, then," remarked Piet. "Surely you don't imagine they would think you took the children away for the mere pleasure of nursing them for a few hours?"

"I feel annoyed about it," said Tante Let, looking at Gijs. "Why could you not have left the little creatures alone? I feel that we are responsible for their death, and my heart tells me that we shall

suffer for this. Send Jantje over this afternoon, and tell him to bury the bodies decently."

"But, mother," argued Gijs, "I cannot see that I am in any way to blame. Why did the Bushmen abandon the children in the veld? They know we farmers rescue the little ones and bring them up, and I think that is what they wanted. Ten to one they were watching me from some secret hiding-place, and saw me removing the children, and naturally did not expect them to be returned."

At that moment a shot rang out clearly from the direction of Boshoeck. Immediately all the diners laid down their knives and forks, and sat listening intently, looking at each other with questioning eyes.

They had not long to wait for another shot, and Gijs was in the act of rising to send Jantje off to enquire the meaning of it when a third shot was heard. Everybody jumped up at once, and Gijs made a bee-line for the stable.

Tante Let rushed to her room to make hurried preparations for going over, while Gijs was harnessing the horses. When Gijs reached the stable Jantje was already bringing the horses out, for he, too, had heard the shots, and knew by experience that any delay on his part would meet with swift punishment. No matter what business was at hand, it had to be dropped immediately and the triple summons obeyed.

As the horses were hurried out of the stable Piet and Koek were speeding to the cart-house to get the harness in readiness, and without a word being spoken the horses were inspanned and the cart

driven to the front door of the house for Tante Let to get in.

Short as was the time allowed her, she was in readiness, holding a little bag and Gijs's gun. She got in at once, and as soon as she was seated, Jantje jumped up beside Gijs. A crack of the whip and the horses dashed along the road to Boshhoek.

It was understood that the party summoned should come armed with a gun, and if possible bring a servant with him to render such assistance as might be required, in view of the uncertainty of the emergency. As accident or sudden sickness was generally the cause of the summons, Tante Let always formed one of the answering party, unless she found it really impossible at the moment to go.

As they approached the farm they could see Wijnand and a small group of children standing by the side of the house awaiting the arrival of the cart ; from which fact Tante Let decided that the trouble was inside the house, as otherwise Wijnand would not be standing still.

As soon as the cart arrived, Wijnand advanced, and, without waiting to be questioned, explained that Jannie, his eight-year-old brother, had been bitten by a puff adder, and was suffering excruciating pains, and that they entertained the gravest fears for the child's life. Tante Let got out hurriedly, and turning to Jantje said " Come."

Jantje, who had jumped off first, in order to stand at the head of the horses, left his post and followed his mistress into the house. It was such an unheard-of thing for a Hottentot to enter a white man's house, that Tante Let's behaviour in taking Jantje

with her into the house requires some explanation.

Jantje was a type of that rare class found amongst Hottentots, and now practically extinct, known to the Dutch as "Gifdoctors" or poison doctors. These must not be confused with the witch doctors of the Kaffirs or the medicine doctors of the Indians. They formed a distinct class by themselves, and differed entirely from all other doctors.

They had no air of supernatural mystery about them, and laid no claim to any occult powers or miraculous performances. They told no fortunes and did not pretend to discover lost property; they were only what they claimed to be—"Poison doctors"; that is, they had acquired the power of resisting in their own persons the effect of any poison from reptile or plant, and to effect a cure in others who had been poisoned, unless their help was called in too late.

The initiation of a young Hottentot into the faculty of a poison doctor is a dangerous as well as painful process, and can only be done by one who is an experienced doctor himself, as otherwise the novice may bring about his own death in the early stages of probation.

The first step the would-be pupil must take is to place himself unreservedly in the hands of an adept, and obey his commands to the letter. The student is then inoculated with some mild vegetable poison by his tutor; which is done by cutting the arms with sharp pieces of glass just deep enough to draw blood, and rubbing in the powder which had been specially prepared for the purpose. The result

is a lethargic condition which lasts for several days; and the same treatment is repeated, until the student is able to undergo the operation without showing any abnormal signs or after effects.

Then small doses of snake poison are administered, and gradually increased, until the pupil is able to swallow the poison of any snake with impunity. When this is accomplished the more trying ordeal comes of having snake poison introduced into the blood. This requires great care and is extremely painful.

When at last the pupil has overcome this stage in training, and his teacher is satisfied with the progress made, the last supreme test is applied of stinging the novitiate with scorpions and later with snakes. When all these various stages have been successfully gone through, and the pupil has given satisfactory proof of immunity from poison, he passes to the ranks of an adept, and is thenceforth known as a poison doctor.

These poison doctors will carry live scorpions and other poisonous insects in their breasts, next to the naked skin, and will allow themselves to be stung by these for the amusement of onlookers.

Should he meet with a snake in the veld, no matter how deadly the variety, the poison doctor is careful to get above the wind in order that the snake may smell him. This is supposed to paralyse the reptile to such an extent that it can be easily captured.

When caught, it is not killed, but secured the while its poison is extracted, which is done by making a slit with a sharp knife on each side of the head where the poison glands are secreted, and in such a

manner as to force the glands through the slit. They are then tied with cotton or a piece of string so as to close the tube connecting the glands with the fangs, and prevent the liquid poison from running out. The glands are then cut off below the string and the snake is allowed to go free.

The poison doctor is never entirely clear of a strange lethargy, is more or less always sleepy and cold, and never feels better than when the summer sun is at its hottest.

Jantje was known as a poison doctor of great fame, having never lost a patient, and, besides treating for snake bites, his services were often requisitioned in cases of ordinary blood poisoning and venomous sores.

When, therefore, Wijnand told Tante Let that his little brother was bitten by a puff adder, she naturally took Jantje with her into the house.

As she entered and heard little Jan's screams, she required no one to guide her to the sick room, and a most pitiful sight met her gaze as she opened the door.

Brandt and his wife were trying to soothe the sufferer, who was writhing about in a frenzy of agony. As soon as Brandt caught sight of Tante Let entering, he exclaimed: "Ah, here is Tante Let! Now you will soon be well."

Mrs. Brandt flew to Tante Let, and flung her arms round the old Boer lady's neck, bursting into a paroxysm of tears. She had kept up bravely, and done everything that a mother could possibly do under such trying circumstances, but the sight of her friend, for whose arrival she had fervently

prayed, was too much for her, and the tears that were stifled in the presence of the child could be withheld no longer.

“ Oh, Tante Let, Tante Let, save him ! save him ! My heart breaks to see the poor lamb suffer so terribly, and we are so helpless ! ”

Tante Let supported her for a moment, whispering words of encouragement, and led her to the door, thrusting her gently outside. Going to the bedside, she found Jantje already at work. He had carefully examined the child's leg, which was swollen to twice its normal size. The two punctures made by the adder's fangs could easily be seen in the calf of the leg near the ankle, and Brandt, to prevent the poison circulating, had tied the child's leg just below the knee with a strong riem—a thong cut from the hide of an ox, and of general use in farming.

This evidently caused considerable pain, as the child continually endeavoured to pull it off, and begged earnestly for its removal.

Jantje's examination did not take one minute.

Moving the child so as to allow the bitten leg to hang over the side of the bed, he took out his pocket knife, and with the small blade cut a deep incision just over the fang marks, so as to open up the punctures altogether. The blood immediately began to flow freely, and as soon as it did so, he motioned to Brandt to undo the thong.

At this moment Tante Let rejoined them, and snatching a basin from the washing-stand managed to catch up the blood therein. As the thong was loosened Jantje rubbed the blood towards the open wound, and this he continued to do, until he was

satisfied that he had let out most of the poisoned blood round the wound. He then undid his "kopdoek," and took from it a number of very small bundles each tied in a little rag, and handed the doek to Tante Let.

A kopdoek is a piece of cloth worn by Hottentots around their heads. That of a poison doctor is never washed, and in consequence becomes quite black with an accumulation of perspiration and dirt, but strange to say, the dirtier it becomes the more it is valued by its owner, and by those who know the virtue of its grime.

Tante Let, who knew exactly what was required, took the kopdoek, and soaked a corner of it in about half a cup full of boiling water, and when it was thoroughly soaked, she wrung it out, collecting in a saucer the little stream of dirt that issued from the cloth, until she had a couple of spoonfuls, which she brought to Jantje.

In the meantime Jantje was by no means idle. Untying one of the little rag bundles he produced a brownish powder, and taking a small pinch, vigorously rubbed it into the bleeding wound. After the third application the bleeding stopped entirely and he tied up the wound with a piece of linen.

Taking the liquid from Tante Let he measured off about a teaspoonful, and mixed it with some water. This he again handed to Tante Let, who, with much coaxing and many promises of childish treasures, induced little Jan to swallow it. Within two minutes it had the desired effect. The little patient vomited as if he would never stop, and his

small frame seemed racked to the utmost, as it strained every effort to eject from the stomach the loathsome and nauseating drug that had been administered. This unpleasant performance lasted about ten minutes, after which the child sank into Tante Let's arms limp with fatigue, and exhausted nature sought recuperation in sleep.

Tante Let laid him down gently and made him comfortable, while Jantje again untied the bandages to examine the wound.

The swelling of the leg had gone down perceptibly, while the parts round the wound seemed more inflamed. He gently washed the blood away from the wound and leg, and proceeded to rub in more of the powder. The leg was then again bound up and the patient left to sleep.

Just as Jantje was gathering up his little bundles Mrs. Brandt tiptoed into the room. From the dining-room, where she had been sitting, she could plainly hear the child's moans and the vomiting, and the sudden cessation of all sounds created such an agony of uncertainty, as to whether her child had succumbed to the poison, or fallen asleep, that she could restrain herself no longer, but had to enter the room and learn the truth.

When Tante Let saw her she signed to her to be silent, and going up to her whispered that the child was asleep, and would assuredly be quite well when he awoke.

Gijs, Wijnand and the children were still standing outside, waiting with anxious faces for some one to report progress.

When Jantje at length came out by the kitchen

door he was immediately surrounded by the little group who waited with bated breath for his first words.

"The klein baas won't die, but the poison is not yet out of his system. He is asleep now, and as soon as he wakes up, I will give him an antidote that will cure him altogether."

This pronouncement was greeted with various exclamations of relief and gratitude, and the tense expression vanished from all faces, for, where poison was concerned, Jantje's verdict, to them, was absolutely reliable. Besides, the mere fact of his coming out of the house was a hopeful sign, as it was well known that, as long as danger threatened the patient, nothing short of the imperative command of Tante Let would ever induce the Hottentot to leave a bedside.

"What has become of the snake?" Jantje asked.

"I found it and killed it," said Wijnand, pointing to where it was lying some distance from the house.

The whole company walked over to it and watched Jantje handling it.

"Why did you crush the head, Baas? I should have liked to get the poison bags."

"You won't catch me leaving the business end of a snake intact if I can help it," said Wijnand.

"Well," said Jantje, "you can be thankful it was a puff adder and not a yellow cobra that bit the boy, for then we would have been too late to save him."

About an hour later, Brandt came out to tell Jantje that the child was becoming restless again, and that Tante Let thought he should be awakened to take

the antidote. Jantje immediately went into the house whilst Brandt remained outside to talk to Gijs.

Jan Brandt was a fine specimen of a well-built man, tall, broad-shouldered and sinewy. His long flowing black beard began to show streaks of white, but the quick penetrating glance of his clear black eyes proved him to be still in the prime of life.

He had the look of one who brooks no interference or disobedience. And yet, on occasion, this strong man, powerful in body and psychic force, became helpless as a little child, and leaned upon any one for support. This happened at times when the softer feelings had full control of him, and when his physical strength was at a discount, and he needed the fortitude of the emotionally strong to help him.

He watched Jantje going into the house, and, with tears glistening in his eyes, said quietly: "Thank God for that Hottentot! Thank God!" Then, pulling himself together, he turned to Gijs and extended his hand. "How are you?"

Gijs in response began talking about sheep and topics of daily interest to farmers, for he had noticed the tears in Brandt's eyes, and endeavoured to lead his thoughts away.

After a while, the question of going to Nachtsmaal was referred to, and the arrangements discussed.

"I saw Neef Piet yesterday, and he told me that he and his family are going, also Gert Coetzee and his crowd," said Brandt.

"That will be jolly, Oom Jan. We are all going in one company, I suppose?"

"Yes, but of course it all depends upon whether

Jannie will be sufficiently recovered to go with us. We will not go, if he is not quite well."

Then, his thoughts recurring to the sick room, he went indoors to ascertain what was going on, whilst Gijs and Wijnand went towards the stable to see after the horses.

Boshoek was a very pretty farm, and in good seasons showed to perfection. Its water supply, however, was deficient, and in times of drought the owner had to move all live stock to an adjoining farm, or more remote places where water could be obtained.

Owing to this serious defect agriculture was out of the question, and supplies of meat and forage had to be bought in season, and made to last throughout the year. Still, as a sheep run, the farm was excellent, and, being very extensive in area, made good the outlay necessitated by its want of water. Brandt acquired this farm on quit-rent from the Government, and had lived there since he was married. In spite of occasional droughts which compelled him to trek with his stock he did remarkably well.

He managed to save sufficient to buy up two other farms adjoining, so that he was looked upon as a well-to-do man, but as he possessed a quiverful he could not be counted as one of the really wealthy Boers of the district.

One of his farms, "Kopje Aleen," was let under a ten years' lease to Piet du Plessis, who paid a fairly high rental for it.

Neef Piet, as Brandt called him, had spent a considerable amount of money in opening up a water

vein that traversed the farm, and in order to enable him to repay himself, this long lease was granted.

His other farm, "Koega," he used as reserve veld for lambing seasons, and was managed by his "bywoner"—Van der Vyver.

"Gijs!"

It was Tante Let calling from the house.

"Yes, mother."

"You can get ready and inspan. It is time to return home."

CHAPTER III

GOING TO NACHTMAAL

ALL the farmers in the neighbourhood were getting ready for the projected excursion to Nachtmaal, and as the news had spread far and wide that there would be three officiating ministers, many who were not so keen at first ultimately decided to go.

To some of the distant farmers, this going to Nachtmaal was not so much a matter of satisfying the soul's cravings by partaking of the Lord's Supper, as the means of having a pleasant holiday to break the monotony of two or three years' continuous farm life, and meeting in town with old friends and relatives from different parts of the district who would usually be attracted townwards on the occasion. To the younger generation, not yet burdened with the more serious contemplations of the risks the human soul runs in being quickened into life on this planet, Nachtmaal simply meant a round of festivities, and hence the great longing of all young people to be in town and share in the gaieties of the time.

As, however, the farms could not be left to the care of the servants, some one or other of the family had to stay at home to supervise and attend to

things. Generally it was a matter of dispute as to who should go or remain.

Bywoners—as white servants are called to distinguish them from native servants—were as a rule very obliging in offering to take charge of farms during the absence of the family, expecting in return some extra compensation for the sacrifice thus imposed upon them in having to forego the pleasure of attending church.

Van der Vyver, who, with the consent of his employer Brandt, had offered to take charge of Sterkfontein, had arrived with his wife and family to assist in the preparations, and take over the farm. He was a very simple man, quite uneducated, but hard-working and honest, and Tante Let knew that she could safely entrust everything to him, and nothing would be unattended to.

About four days after the occurrence at Boshoeck, Piet rode over on horseback to learn how Jannie was getting on. He found him up and about but still limping, and looking paler than usual.

Jantje, at Brandt's request, had remained at Boshoeck to attend to Jannie's wound, until he could pronounce him out of danger.

After Piet had made the necessary enquiries, and delivered the usual greetings of goodwill and regards from his mother, he was immediately monopolized by Japie, his special friend. Japie was only slightly older than Piet, being fourteen years of age, and the two were as close in their friendship as their elder brothers.

Japie was bursting with impatience to lay before Piet a scheme that he had formulated, and

coaxed him out of the house, so as to get him alone.

"Man, I have a plan that is just too jolly for words," he said.

"What is it?" asked Piet, interestedly.

"You see," went on Japie, "Father, mother, and Wijnand, Jannie and the baby, are going to Nachtmaal, and of course I have to stay at home as usual, there being no room for me in the cart. It was Wijnand's turn to stop, but he is so bent upon going, that he has promised me almost anything if I would let him go, and remain at home in his stead."

"And what is he going to give you for staying?"

"He has not said yet, but I am going to ask him for something which I am afraid he will refuse."

"What is it?" Piet was becoming quite excited.

"You know how careful he is about his new gun? He won't allow anybody except Gijs to shoot with it, and I do so want to try it myself, but he always refuses. I am going to tell him that if he allows me the use of the gun during his absence, and gives me some ammunition, so that I can amuse myself, I will stay."

Piet whistled by way of expressing his surprise at the audacity of the scheme.

"But you must promise me, Piet, that you will also try to get Gijs's gun, and stay with me, otherwise there will be no fun."

"I don't think mother will allow it, because she wishes me to attend church. She says I am getting big, and am still a perfect heathen."

"Oh," replied Japie, "I will go and see Tante

Let, and ask her myself. I will ask her to let me stay with you at Sterkfontein, for I am sure that Tante Hessie Van der Vyver will not mind."

Piet was quite taken up with the proposition, and readily agreed to stay at home if his mother would consent.

The greatest ambition of a young Boer, entering his teens, is to own a gun and a horse, and to acquire these he will make any sacrifice. He is taught to shoot from his ninth year, and by the time he is twelve is as much at home with fire-arms as men of long experience. Shooting and riding constitute a Boer's only sports, and consequently he attains a high degree of proficiency in both, when still very youthful.

His horse is his companion and friend, and he soon knows all about him, his speed, strength, staying power, vices or virtues, and can tell his every mark and point.

In buying a gun a young farmer makes the most minute and critical examination of lock, stock and barrel, and will never dream of closing a bargain before he has tested its accuracy by actual shooting.

When at length the gun is bought it becomes almost sacred to its purchaser. It is handled with the greatest care, regarded, indeed, with affection, and is carefully trained to the owner's requirements, that is to say, the sight is aligned to a nicety in readiness for lowering or raising as the gun shoots high or low. The pull of the trigger is regulated until it responds to the required strength, and, when necessary, the barrel is bent until the weapon is perfectly true in every respect.

To borrow such a gun from a Boer is to put his friendship to a very severe test, and it is a common saying among Boers that a horse, a gun, and a wife are three things that should never be lent out.

It was therefore with genuine surprise that Piet listened to Japie's intention of asking Wijnand for the loan of his gun.

Early the following morning Japie arrived at Sterkfontein to interview Tante Let, and Piet could see by the happy expression on his face that he had succeeded with Wijnand.

"How did you manage to get Wijnand's gun?" was Piet's first question.

"Last night when he came from Kopje Aleen, I saw that he was more anxious than ever to go to town, so I pretended that I had made up my mind not to stay at home, as it was four years since I had last been in a dorp. Wijnand pleaded with me, and said he would bring me a nice present, but I complained that I would be too lonely on the farm as I had not even a gun with which to amuse myself. The bait took, and he immediately offered me his gun and ammunition."

The little schemer laughed heartily at the idea of having wheedled his brother into compliance.

"As soon as I found out that Nettie du Plessis was going with her parents I knew that I should get the gun, because Wijnand has lately been looking for any pretext to go to Kopje Aleen." And he smiled knowingly at Piet.

Japie approached Tante Let in fear and trembling to make his request, and a bad half-hour he had with her, as she pointedly refused, saying that Piet's

religious education was sadly neglected and that she would have to answer for it in the hereafter.

Piet retired crestfallen, and when, later, the two boys were called in to dinner, they looked the picture of juvenile dejection.

They had, however, an unexpected champion in Tante Hessie, who pleaded their cause so effectively that Tante Let at last gave in on being assured that the boys would be well looked after, and that it would be a real pleasure, as well as a help, to Van der Vyver to have them on the farm.

Their faces lightened up at once as they promised to be models of goodness and propriety, and Tante Let, seeing how the boys immediately recovered their spirits, felt happy that she had relented.

As soon as dinner was over the boys saddled their horses, and rode over to Boshhoek to get the permission of Japie's parents for him to stay with Piet at Sterkfontein.

"Mother," said Gijs, "we have only a few days in which to make ready, and I am afraid our waggon is not large enough to hold all the produce and accommodate us also. We shall either have to take the cart as well for you and me, and let the boys follow in the waggon, or I must borrow a larger waggon."

"In any case our waggon will be too small, so you had better go over to Kopje Aleen and ask Nief Piet for the loan of his buck waggon, if he is not using it himself."

Gijs was preparing to drive over that afternoon when Jantje arrived from Boshhoek and told him that du Plessis, who had gone over to Boshhoek just as he was leaving, had sent word that he would come

to Sterkfontein for the night, as he wished to know whether Gijs could take some things into town for him.

“ Is the Baas riding ? ”

“ No, klein Baas, he came over in his buggy, and the klein nooi is with him.”

Gijs said nothing, but his heart began to beat fast, for he had one great secret that he dared not even impart to Wijnand, and that secret was—
Nettie du Plessis !

Gijs was in love with her ; deeply, sincerely in love, and in all his day-dreams and castles in the air Nettie was queen, goddess, idol.

Nettie's feminine instinct had long since told her the secret, and she often wondered that Gijs never made any reference to his feeling for her, not even when opportunity and the drift of conversation favoured the attempt.

Time and time again Gijs meant to speak, but when occasion threw the pair together he became helplessly tongue-tied as though he were a mute.

How he hated himself for his cowardice and detestable timidity ! She would never guess, he thought, how deeply he loved her, and there was always the chance that she might become engaged to some one else.

Nettie felt irritated at Gijs's silence, for she had a real liking for him, and, womanlike, was longing for a declaration from a man who she knew was not a trifler. Besides, Wijnand was also showing her marked attention, and though she by no means disliked him, she felt that Wijnand would speak out soon, and, knowing that that would for ever

seal Gijs's lips, she made up her mind not to give him an opportunity of doing so, until she was certain about Gijs's feelings.

This was the state of affairs when she and her father arrived at Sterkfontein to spend the evening there.

Both Tante Let and Gijs advanced to the cart as it stopped, to welcome the comers.

"Ah! Neef Piet," said Tante Let, smiling, "I was looking out for the first signs of rain, but did not expect it in this pleasant form."

Du Plessis, who understood the allusion to the rarity of his visits, laughed pleasantly, and heartily shook the hands extended to him.

"It is kind of you to say so, Tante, but to be on the safe side I brought Nettie with me, in case you would not acknowledge me any longer."

"You've done well, and, as usual, you are full of resource." They all laughed merrily and walked towards the house, while Jantje took charge of the cart and horses.

Nettie was bright and chatty, and kept the whole company in good spirits with her sallies of wit and fun. Gijs had little to say, but was all eyes, and when once or twice Nettie saw his unconcealed admiration for her, the colour mounted to her cheeks, and momentarily confused her in what she was saying. "If his tongue were as eloquent as his eyes," she thought to herself, "how pleasant it would be to listen to him."

Nettie was already nineteen, and among the Boers that is considered high time for a girl to be settled down with a husband. As a rule, girls are

confirmed as members of the Church when they are sixteen, and from that moment suitors are welcomed and encouraged.

Nettie was in no hurry to get married. Of suitors she had many, but not only had she never been stirred into any semblance of love by them, but she felt that she had not yet been addressed by any one who was really attached to her, so that the declarations she received filled her with aversion and disgust, as being counterfeit and ungenuine.

She was not a beauty in face. On the contrary, many, at first sight, would call her plain, and, being quite unacquainted with the sophistries of fashion, she did nothing to enhance her natural graces.

She had an abundant crop of long, auburn hair, which had those precious tints that come and go in flashes. Her mouth was perfect as to shape and curve of lip, and its healthy red contrasted beautifully with her small white teeth.

Where she made up for any facial defects was in the magnificent figure with which Nature had blessed her. Though not tall, she was erect and very stately, and the firm bust, so indispensable to the perfect female figure, was hers in the fulness of beauty.

What most attracted men to her was an arresting congeniality, a magnetic atmosphere that defied definition, but which, nevertheless, exercised a far more potent influence than does mere physical perfection.

Once under the spell of her unconscious attraction

men naturally gravitated towards her as moths to the light.

Always overflowing with fun and laughter, she did not know what seriousness meant. Tante Let often said that half an hour in Nettie's society was enough to banish melancholy for a week.

Despite this lightness of heart, there was nothing superficial in the girl's nature, and all her friendships and affections were stedfastly cherished and preserved, even though the object of her regard fell under a cloud of ill-report or adversity. This trait in her character was well known to all Nettie's acquaintances, and few ever dared to indulge in scandal in her presence.

Nettie thought most highly of Gijs, and had he summoned up sufficient courage to propose, she would undoubtedly have accepted him, but she saw quite clearly that, for some reason unknown to her, and although he appeared to be in love, he restrained himself. She knew that he was by nature extraordinarily shy, but could not bring herself to believe that shyness was the only reason holding the young Boer back, and often worried herself in trying to find out what the real cause might be.

Wijnand she also liked very greatly, but somehow she preferred Gijs, although she did not quite understand why. Perhaps, had the latter been more demonstrative she would have liked him less. It was his reserve and aloofness that piqued and interested her.

Truth to tell, Nettie, although preferring Gijs to Wijnand, found herself in a dilemma as to which of the two she could really love best, and this proved

to her mind that she did not love either sufficiently to justify marriage.

"Oh, bother it!" she often exclaimed to herself, "I shall leave it to fate whether I shall marry either or neither, since I cannot have both," and she would laugh at her own folly in causing herself so much perplexity.

Du Plessis himself entertained a secret hope that Gijs would marry Nettie, and it was with some misgivings that he saw how frequent Wijnand's visits were becoming; but he was too wise a man to speak to Nettie about it, knowing that parental opposition to a suitor is fatal. He, therefore, determined to say nothing at all, but to try to bring Nettie and Gijs together as much as possible and leave the issue to chance.

That night at supper they discussed all Nachtmaal arrangements. Gijs was to come over with his trek-gear and oxen and fetch du Plessis's buck-waggon, and at the same time load up some bundles of sheepskins that he had promised to take to town with him.

After supper, and before the table was cleared, Gijs, as was his wont, took up the family Bible and handed round some hymn-books that showed signs of long use. With a steady voice he read one of David's psalms, and when he finished it, he asked du Plessis to offer up a prayer. No sooner was this ended than Tante Let, in a shrill soprano, started singing a psalm, which they all knew and joined in:

Prys den Heer met blijde galmen
Gij myn ziel hebt rijke stof.

The next morning Gijs began to make preparations for the trip to town. As it was a full year since he had last been there, a great quantity of produce had accumulated, and this he had to take with him to be converted into money.

There were about three hundred sheep and goat skins, besides a quantity of ox hides to be sorted out, and neatly tied into bales, so as to admit of easy packing into the waggon.

Sterkfontein yielded about five hundred bags of wheat every year, and this, besides the progeny of her stock, constituted Tante Let's chief income.

Her neighbours, as a rule, bought up most of her wheat, and the balance she sent to town. From her last season she still had about two hundred bags on hand, and these had to be sold before harvesting commenced again.

There was also going to be a church bazaar in town, to which Tante Let was expected to contribute handsomely. As she was presenting wheat, Gijs had to take a sufficient quantity to meet all requirements, and he had to borrow a larger waggon than they owned.

What with going over to Kopje Aleen to fetch the waggon, staying a day there, sorting skins, baling them, loading wheat and generally ordering things on the farm, and instructing Van der Vyver in his duties, Gijs had a few very busy days previous to their departure.

Tante Let and Van der Vyver's wife were equally busy. Food supplies had to be prepared for the trip, for things were expensive in town, and as Tante Let was well stocked with all that was required,

it would have been folly to spend money on what she had in abundance.

Hampers full of cakes, as well as bread, and a bag full of biscuits had to be baked. Meat had to be dried and preserved, poultry and pigs killed and cured, and a thousand and one other duties attended to, such as the overhauling of Gijs's wardrobe, as well as her own; washing, ironing, mending, darning, and what not.

The day previous to starting, Japie came over, proudly holding Wijnand's gun, to take up his abode with Piet, and told Tante Let that all was in readiness at Boshhoek, and that the whole party would be at Sterkfontein at about eight o'clock the next morning—it being on their way to town.

Gijs was astir very early to attend to the sheep, and regulate things generally for Van der Vyver, to give final orders to servants, and complete the loading of the waggon with the food supplies and bedding, besides a multitude of smaller things, held over to the last minute.

It was a day's journey by waggon to town, and, with the usual delays of business combined with pleasure, it generally involved an absence of ten or twelve days.

Punctually at eight the party arrived. They were seen coming, as soon as they left Boshhoek, and Gijs had arranged to have the waggon and cart inspanned and ready to join them without any unnecessary delay.

A short halt was called and the whole party gathered in the house for a cup of coffee. The women kissed each other, the men shook hands,

and there was a babel of voices and laughing, enough to make any one wish to join the merry party.

There were Brandt and his wife, with Wijnand and Jannie, besides four other children ; Dü Plessis, his wife, Nettie and a younger brother ; Coetzee, with his wife and two grown-up daughters ; and a family of the name of Venter, consisting of father, mother, a strapping daughter and two grown-up sons.

Tante Let and Du Plessis alone travelled by cart, all the others went in the ox waggons. These waggons were loaded to their utmost capacity with all sorts of produce, but at the back of the waggon was left a space, covered over by a low canopy, for the family to huddle in.

This mode of travelling is by no means convenient, and one unaccustomed to it is apt to contract cramp from sitting too long in the same position, but those who are used to it make themselves comfortable, and are quite at home.

When they were ready to start Gijs proposed that the old people should occupy the two carts, which could easily accommodate them, and that the young folk should distribute themselves amongst the waggons.

This was eagerly assented to by young and old alike, and the party forthwith proceeded to take their seats.

Wijnand had a concertina on which he was an expert player, and without which he seldom travelled long distances. He also had a guitar on which Gijs had learned to strum chords in accompaniment to Wijnand's playing on the concertina. These

he brought with him to beguile the tedious hours of the long journey over the Karroo, and, as soon as all were seated, and the word given to start, he took up the concertina and began playing a lively waltz.

Thus, with laughter and talking, and shouting good-byes to those remaining behind, the cracks of the whip and the strains of the waltz, the happy procession at last formed into line and began its journey.

When they were gone a few hundred yards, Piet and Japie came out of the house, each with a gun, and fired two shots after the retreating party as a valediction, while Jantje, who also had to remain behind, at the same time waved his coat over his head.

CHAPTER IV

VICTORIA WEST

VICTORIA WEST, a typical Karroo dorp, is situated in a hollow, between two mountains almost touching each other, and forming a narrow poort on the west side of the town that could easily be connected by a wall scarcely a hundred yards long. So cramped in is the town by the surrounding mountains that extension to the north, south, and west is impossible, and, as building on the east means going farther and farther away from the business centre, ground in that direction has become almost unsaleable.

As the water supply is poor and the monopoly of a small number of water-erf holders, tentative attempts at tree-planting ended as they began, but for all its barren appearance Victoria West compares favourably with other Karroo towns, and has always been considered a good business centre.

In Tante Let's time it only boasted about fifty buildings all told, and these of a very crude and unpretentious description. Still, to the young Karroo farmer of those days, who had seen nothing more imposing than a farm, Victoria West was a wonderful place of activity and life.

For the greater part of the year the town seemed

half asleep, and everybody in it listless and heavy, as though life offered nothing worth living for; but when Nachtsmaal came round it suddenly woke up from its lethargy and assumed an aspect of bustle quite foreign to its usual comatose condition.

For several days previous, the store-keepers were busy displaying their wares to the best advantage for the allurements of the Tantes and Nichtjes who were sure to come from distant farms to lay in a stock of clothes and fineries.

Outside, the clerks were busily weighing skins, wool, corn, and other produce, and haggling over the prices and market rates.

On the Church Square the local auctioneer was shouting himself hoarse to a small crowd, to whom he was trying to sell a conglomeration of wares, ranging from a frying-pan to a span of oxen. Farther up the street a stream of men and women and servants were entering the Church Hall, laden with baskets, bags and canisters, preparing for the bazaar in aid of the ecclesiastical exchequer.

Standing round the church was a group of men dressed in ill-fitting long frock coats, which proclaimed them to be the elders and deacons come to attend a vestry meeting with the Predikant. They constituted the much-dreaded Kerkraad of the Dutch Church, which formerly exercised so much power and influence over their congregation, but has of late years become solely a board for the management of finance and investigating interesting bits of scandal.

Looking at the faces of these men one would conclude from their expressions that to them was

assigned the task of stamping out sin, root and branch, from the earth, so serious and solemn were they—for all the world as though they expected at any moment to find themselves in close combat with Satan himself.

Their ideas of sin were as incongruous as their conceptions of duty were inconsistent. John might drag Peter through law court after law court, ruining him body and soul, and the Kerkraad would not interfere, but should little Janet have loved not wisely but too well, forgetting the necessary blessing of the church, then, oh then, the Kerkraad could not call a special meeting quickly enough to weigh up the enormity of Janet's sin and purge the church from unholy iniquity, which was accomplished by placing the girl under a solemn ban pronounced from the pulpit.

It is the ambition of each young Boer some day to be elected a member of this Kerkraad, and if he is well-to-do he will sooner or later be invested with the frock coat and white tie. If, however, he has to work hard for a livelihood his chances of election are small.

Of course to become a "Predikant" is to reach the acme of respectability, but this High Priestly office is reserved for those who have sufficient means to study at a theological college.

As this group was collecting round the church, Tante Let and Nettie passed by on their way to the bazaar. They nodded to the men whom they knew, and just at that moment the Rev. Liliefeldt came up to the elders and deacons awaiting his presence to commence the meeting.

“ Good gracious, Tante Let ! ” exclaimed Nettie, “ do notice the expressions on the men’s faces ! I know every elder and deacon among them, and marvel how they manage to appear so saintly. The Predikant looks as though he had just been entrusted by Heaven with a new commandment, commencing, ‘ Thus saith the Lord.’ ”

“ Nettie, how can you say such things ? ” remonstrated Tante Let.

“ It is true, Tante Let. Look at the elders with their ‘ pity-my-simplicity ’ air ! Isn’t it too ridiculous ? ”

“ Nettie, Nettie, child, you must not speak so. It is very wicked.” But in spite of her words Tante Let could not help smiling.

Every nook and corner of the town was occupied, and there were many who could not find accommodation. Farmers learn very early the need of providing temporary shelters, and the majority brought with them the large tarpaulins which are used for covering loaded ox-waggon in rainy seasons. A tarpaulin thrown over an empty wagon reaches to the ground on either side and forms a comfortable, if somewhat crude, tent, dust-proof and watertight.

At the east end of the town quite a number of waggons had collected, each covered with the serviceable tarpaulin ; and as these waggons were drawn up close to each other and arranged with an eye to forming a semicircle, they not only formed a picturesque sight, but tended to bring all the occupants of the waggons together, and promote fellowship and good feeling amongst them.

Although Tante Let possessed a little house in town, known as a church house—being only occupied on church occasions—her waggon, as well as the waggons of Brandt, Venter, and Coetzee, formed part of the semicircle, and with the exception of Tante Let, Nettie, Brandt and his wife, who slept in the cottage, all the others lived and slept in their waggon tents.

So happy and comfortable did the crowd at the waggons make themselves, that many of the young people from town spent the evenings with them in merry-making, and kept up the fun till late at night. These waggon parties were the chief feature of the *Nachtmaal*, and were looked forward to by the younger generation of both town and district. Their parents also found much enjoyment in taking a stroll down to the waggons in the evening to watch the young folk, and occasionally joining in the fun going forward.

Tante Let and her party reached town early on Thursday afternoon, and, as was customary, the waggons were first driven up to the shop to deposit their loads.

It is a peculiar and unaccountable trait in the Boer character, that he much prefers to do business with an Englishman or a Jew than with a fellow-Dutchman. Whether it is the unadaptability of the Cape Dutchman for mercantile business, or his want of tact in dealing with customers, certain it is that the average young Boer has a fine contempt for any Dutch business house, and never by any chance gives a Dutch firm his undivided support.

Perhaps it is because the Dutch winkel, or shop,

as a rule, presents an appearance of untidiness which somehow creates the impression that the stock is antiquated and lacks that atmosphere of newness and up-to-dateness which is so essential to the increase of custom.

The commercial Jew is irresistible to the Boer, for what he lacks in personal cleanliness he makes up in tact. By flattery and cajolery he generally manages to coax the Boer into buying many articles he does not require.

In Tante Let's time there were only three shops in Victoria West, the largest of which was owned by a worthy Hebrew named Herman Tugendreich. As this name was quite beyond the linguistic attainments of the Boer, he was generally known and addressed as "Tukie." A more shrewd business man it would be difficult to imagine. He was liked by old and young, black and white, and consequently he did a large trade, and was on the high road to opulence and ease.

Tukie was short and stout, and not over-prepossessing in appearance, but he was the best natured man known. Children would chaff him as he passed in the street, and women always had a word to say to him, teasing him about his celibacy. Only the men considered him a good-natured fool.

Tukie was never known to lose his temper at anything or anybody, but met all gibes and pleasant-ries at his expense with a smile ; consequently, no one ever got angry with him. But, withal, Tukie had brains—keen business brains, and his store was the envy of neighbouring storekeepers. His methods of making money were a mystery to all, for he in-

variably undersold others, and always paid a fraction more for the produce he purchased than any other dealer.

There was only one flaw in Tukie's business capacity. He was such a wretched mathematician that he frequently made disastrous mistakes in his accounts, and more often than not threw the day of the month and the year into the money column to be added up in the total. The average Boer of the period would do anything, and pay any sum, rather than tackle the herculean task of adding up two or three sheets of figures, and consequently, in the majority of cases, the error remained undiscovered.

Should, however, such a regrettable mistake be brought to Tukie's notice, he was so profuse in his apologies, so sincere in his condemnation of his methods, that he was always forgiven—especially as he at once refunded over-payments, and penalized himself by handing the injured customer a valuable present as well.

Where Tukie scored over his competitors was in the excellently managed little refreshment-room at the back of the shop. Therein could always be found a barrel of good brandy, and another of a sweetish wine. If a customer had been buying steadily for some time and showed ominous signs of fatigue, he would be convoyed in the most sympathetic manner to the back room and served with such refreshment as was calculated to revive the drooping spirit. After this pleasant pick-me-up and rejuvenating interval, business proceeded again with renewed energy.

Tukie, of course, knew all his customers well, and

some he would not dare offer any refreshments on the premises. To such he would send a bottle with the goods bought, and the said bottle was never once "returned with thanks!"

To women he would give presents of sweets, handkerchiefs or snuff, and in some cases, a bottle of sweet wine would not be deemed amiss.

Whether this made his shop popular, or whether it was simply that his goods and prices gave more satisfaction is not certain, but the fact remained that he did the best business in town, at that time, and at *Nachtmaal* especially his shop would be crowded from early morning till late at night.

As Gijs arrived with his waggon, Tukie went up to him to extend the usual greeting.

"I hope you have brought me a lot of produce this time, Gijs," he said. "It is quite a year since I last saw you. What you think?"

"My waggon is loaded," said Gijs. "But I have a good mind not to sell anything to you, as last time you paid such ridiculously low prices that it scarcely made good the expense of bringing the stuff in."

"My dear fellow," replied Tukie, rubbing his hands together, and smiling affably, "I give the best prices in town, and often a sudden drop in the market loses me a hundred pounds. What you think?" and without more ado he shouted for his natives to come forward, and unload.

Some waggons were already waiting, and others were continually drawing up, whilst numbers of customers were waiting to be served. There was a running to and fro of clerks, a continual shouting to boys to do this and that, and a hustle and crowd-

ing that gave the place something of the appearance of an auction market. Tukie ran in and out, here, there and everywhere, cracking jokes, and jabbering continually to customers without doing any serving himself. His clerks and employees knew, however, from experience, that his eyes were everywhere, and that nothing escaped him.

He often caught customers pilfering goods and hiding them about their persons, but never made the mistake of accusing them of theft. He simply entered the articles in their account at about double the price.

On one occasion an old lady found a pair of scissors on her account that she had surreptitiously annexed, and not knowing that Tukie's eyes had duly noted the incident, went in a rage to him to remonstrate about being charged with something she never bought.

After listening patiently to the old lady's abuse Tukie took her aside and said,

"My dear Tante, I am sorry that you have forgotten the scissors, but I am sure I can recall it to your mind. You will remember, the day you came in we were all so busy that we could not serve you at once, and you were therefore simply compelled to serve yourself. My clerk and I saw it, and were very pleased indeed that you were so considerate, and we spoke about it afterwards. What you think?"

The Tante looked sheepish, but after a while seemed suddenly to remember the incident, and looked so pleased at the manner in which Tukie had brought it back to her memory that she forgot to grumble about the high price levied.

After Gijs had discharged his load, he took his waggon to the outspan, where he was subsequently joined by Wijnand and others.

As it was already sunset all were busy drawing their waggons into the semicircle, and preparing tents and sleeping accommodation for the night.

When work for the day was finished Wijnand strolled over to Gijs's waggon for a chat, and to discuss the programme they could map out for their stay.

"What shall we do to-night, Gijs?" he asked, for it was out of the question that they should spend the night idly, now that they were in town.

"I have not yet given it a thought, but come to the cottage, and we can see what mother and Nettie are going to do. Perhaps they are going somewhere, and we can go with them."

Tante Let and Nettie were equally undecided as to their movements for the evening, so Wijnand immediately suggested some sport at the waggons.

This Tante Let knew was inevitable, and as she was by no means a "kill joy," she encouraged the idea, more especially as it happened to be one of those warm, bright moonlight nights with which the Karroo is so frequently blessed.

To the young farmer of that time "an evening spend," as it was called, conveyed the idea of outdoor games, in which everybody, old and young, took part, and so merry and happy were they in their innocent joy, and so heartily did they abandon themselves to the spirit of the moment, that the most austere onlooker would be infected by their mood, and be impelled to join the company.

Round games, square games, kissing games, and games of every description were played. Dancing was, however, not allowed.

Dancing was considered by the Predikant to be one of the most deadly sins that could be committed, and should it become known that a few young people had been so immoral as to indulge in a few waltzes, the Kerkraad would take serious notice of it, and the Predikant exhaust himself in the pulpit, in denouncing the practice as Satanic and hellish. Did not the children of Israel worship the Golden Calf by dancing round it, and was not dancing the immediate cause that forced John the Baptist to part company with his head?

The young Boer, however, when out on the farm, took precious little notice of his reverend pastor's exhortations, but danced to his heart's content whenever opportunity offered.

While in town, and especially at Nachtmaal time, he would refrain, as it would be an unpardonable crime to dance under the very nose of the Predikant, and desecrate the holy occasion which called the worshippers together.

After the evening meal, the whole party strolled to the waggons, where they found a number of young people from the town already congregated, to call on their friends from the district.

Wijnand passed round word that there would be games, and very soon the young folk collected, eager for an evening's enjoyment.

It would be tiring to describe the various games in which running, kissing and singing were the chief features, but, however imbecile they were, the

principal object was attained, of creating fun, laughter and bodily exercise.

It was well past midnight when the party broke up.

Gijs had enjoyed himself in the usual manner, and but for one fact, the night would have been perfect—whenever he wanted Nettie for a partner, he would find Wijnand monopolising her, and although she gave him a fair share of attention, still for the first time he became aware of the fact that he might have a possible rival in his friend.

Wijnand likewise became uneasy at the persistency with which Gijs sought out Nettie, for he feared to have him as a rival, thinking that it would be natural for any girl to prefer Gijs, on account of the comfortable circumstances in which fate had placed him.

It was agreed that Wijnand should share Gijs's tent for the night, and as they prepared their beds, each felt that a shadow had somehow come between them, that might sooner or later materialize into a breach.

This, each devoutly prayed, might not be the case, and hoped that the other's feelings for Nettie might prove to be nothing more serious than one of friendship.

Still, as they spread their beds on the ground in the tent, there was an unwonted silence between them, which neither for a time noticed, owing to an intense preoccupation of mind.

Gijs, after weighing the matter carefully, came to the conclusion that the best course would be to confide his hopes to Wijnand, who, he felt sure,

would keep his counsel, and leave the coast clear—unless he, too, had matrimonial designs.

As soon as they were comfortable in bed, Gijs broke silence.

“ Well, how did you enjoy the party ? ” he asked.

“ First rate ; but I feel quite knocked up with running and laughing.”

Again silence. Gijs had not thought it was so hard to confide a secret of that description to Wijnand, but now that he came to try it, he did not for the life of him know how to introduce the subject, though he felt he had to do it, and do it at once, as otherwise he would lose courage altogether. He made a great mental effort, and sitting up in bed said : “ Wijnand, old chap, I have a great secret to tell you.”

Wijnand’s heart gave a mighty thump, for he had no doubt as to what the secret would be. He also sat up in bed as he said : “ I did not know that you had any secret that I did not share. What is it ? ”

Fortunately the tent was dark, for Gijs’s face turned crimson with embarrassment as the truth of the remark dawned upon him.

“ I intended telling you some time, Wijnand, but I could not muster sufficient courage to do so. To-night, however, I made up my mind that you should know. The fact is, I am dead in love with Nettie du Plessis.”

He had blurted it out at last, but his voice was trembling with agitation, and Wijnand knew by his manner that Gijs was hopelessly in love. He also knew that Gijs—the man of few words—was a man

of very strong passions, and a love once formed would, with him, last for life.

But what about himself! He loved Nettie—deeply and sincerely. She was his one hope, his happiness, his dream. She had already become, as it were, part of his everyday life, and to efface her from his heart would be utterly impossible. Had any other man rivalled his suit, he would gladly have put his whole heart and soul into the contest, to win her favour; but Gijs, his best, his only friend, his “David”!

The blow was cruel, and up to that fatal night, unexpected. Could he think of giving her up? No, not even to Gijs.

The veins in his forehead began to swell and throb as these thoughts surged through his mind, and for some time he remained silent, trying to subdue his emotions.

“Gijs, I am sorry to hear it,” he said at length, and his voice sounded husky and far away.

“Sorry? Why should you be sorry? It will not affect our friendship. You will always remain my dearest friend, and I shall always love you, Wijnand, always.”

“It is not that, Gijs. It——” Here he broke off, and covering his face with his hands, tried to repress the violent throbbing of his temples.

“What is it, man? Tell me why you are sorry!” said Gijs anxiously.

“I am sorry because I love her more than my own life, and hope to make her my wife.”

It was now Gijs’s turn to gasp. Although he felt what was coming, he could not realise the truth,

until the words, almost sobbed out by Wijnand, stabbed him like a dagger to the heart.

After a while, Gijs recovered himself sufficiently to ask : " Have you told Nettie that you love her ? "

" No, not yet," replied Wijnand. " I meant to do so, but have not had an opportunity. Have you ? "

" No, nor I either," said Gijs. " I had the opportunity, but lacked the courage."

" Well, it is perfectly clear that we can't both marry her. One of us must give her up."

" You speak very easily of giving her up," said Gijs. " To me it would mean misery and desolation, for I tell you, Wijnand, I would not prize life one jot without her. I long since made up my mind, that, should she refuse me altogether, I will leave the district for good, as it would be agony to see her the wife of another."

" That's just what I feel," said Wijnand ; " and yet it would be madness in either of us to decide on a life of misery, simply because she has to refuse one of us, perhaps both."

" I do not care," said Gijs vehemently. " Now that things have taken this turn it is right that she should know the whole proposition, and make her choice."

" Who is to explain matters to her ? "

" I will, for I am desperate."

" No, thank you. I do not believe in love-making by proxy," hastily observed Wijnand.

" It will not be a love-making scene. I propose that we should go to her together and explain the position."

" A kind of joint proposal ! Ridiculous ! "

And then, in spite of their seriousness, both burst out laughing.

"Well, how is it to be done otherwise?" asked Gijs.

"That's the difficulty. If we propose separately she might accept the first comer, and give the other no chance at all. Perhaps it would be better not to mention it to her for the present, until we have turned the matter over in our minds and arrived at a plan that would be just to us both."

"Very well," said Gijs, "if you promise not to mention it to her for a month, I will do the same."

"I promise," said Wijnand, only too anxious to gain time, feeling as he did Gijs's superiority in point of wealth and attractions.

CHAPTER V

NACHTMAAL

VERY early the following morning, about half an hour before daybreak, servants began to stir at the waggons, making fires to prepare coffee.

The Boer is a very early riser, and a great coffee drinker ; in fact, coffee has become his national drink, although, unfortunately, South Africa does not produce it.

When coffee is unavailable, barley, peas or corn, and sometimes even the soft bark of a certain tree is used instead, and although the substitute may be unpalatable, still it is partaken of on the principle of " better something than nothing."

Gijs and Wijnand were up with the first, sitting round their camp fire on low stools, drinking coffee. They were still full of the subject they had discussed over-night, and their conversation on commonplaces was strained and difficult, and assumed a tone of unusual deference.

Every now and then they would be lost in thought, and would stare vacantly into the fire. At last Gijs could endure it no longer, and felt that he must refer to the subject again.

" I had very little sleep during the night," he

began, " thinking about our agreement. I think I have found a way out of the difficulty. I propose that we each write her a letter declaring our love, and post them together, so as to ensure her receiving them at the same time. She can then act according to the dictates of her heart."

" And if she does not decide at once ? "

" Then each will be free to press his suit, for there will be no injustice in that, as she will know that we both love her."

" When shall we write the letters ? "

" Not until we are back at home, for we must not spoil her fun while she is in town," remarked Gijs.

Wijnand saw the justice of this, and agreed to the scheme. He would have liked to postpone the letter-writing for at least a month, but he knew that when an emergency arose, Gijs was not the man to temporise, and he feared that any undue delay would irritate him. This Wijnand wished to avoid, for he dearly loved his friend, and to violate the code of honour that existed between them never entered his mind. Gijs, likewise, would have scorned any idea of taking an advantage over Wijnand, and in pressing for immediate action he only gave expression to his nature.

" Suppose," said Wijnand, after a while, " Nettie accepts me, what are you going to do ? "

Gijs took the kettle from the fire, and refilled their cups. He fetched sugar from the tent, and, having helped himself, passed it on to Wijnand.

" If she does," he replied, staring absently into the fire, and speaking in a low voice, as though communing with himself, " I shall at least thank

God that He has given my dearest friend such a wife, and I shall share in her happiness and yours : but the day you marry her I shall leave Sterkfontein for ever."

The tears gathered in Wijnand's eyes as he replied : " Gijs, you are too good ; and if it was not that I simply cannot give her up, I should stand aside altogether."

" No, no," the other protested, " let her decide, for she may love you and not me, and if you stand aside, she may think that you do not want her, and accept me for mere pity's sake. We would thus deprive her of her natural right to choose her husband, and make her life miserable. No, no ; anything but that."

" But what if she accepts neither of us ? "

" I shall hope on, and try to make myself worthy of her, and never lose heart."

An old farmer from an adjoining waggon, seeing these two sitting comfortably round the fire, came up to them and unceremoniously squatted down alongside them.

Boers never wait for an introduction amongst themselves, but just extend the hand, saying, " I am So-and-so." This introduction is a sufficient passport to any Boer company, and the newcomer is always welcomed, however poor he may be.

Generally the stranger is closely questioned as to his family connections, business, place of residence, and state of health, which questions are always answered good-naturedly, as a matter of course.

Gijs, however, did not question his visitor, but, following the usual hospitable custom, immediately

poured out a bowl of coffee, and handed it to the newcomer, who gratefully accepted it.

The stranger, who had introduced himself as Willem Botha, proved to be a respectable landowner and an ex-member of the Kerkraad. He became chatty over the coffee, and began to talk about matters connected with the church and Nachتماال.

"I suppose you have heard what happened in the Kerkraad meeting yesterday?"

"No, Oom," replied Wijnand. "We know that there was a meeting yesterday, but have not heard any details, as we were so busy."

"It is the best joke I have ever heard, old as I am, and I heard some funny things during the time I was a member of the Kerkraad, Neef," said Oom Willem.

"It is so seldom that one hears of a joke in the Kerkraad, that I should like to hear this one," replied Gijs.

"Well, I will tell you, though I am not supposed to talk about it, for Neef Willem Schaefkuyk, one of the members of the Kerkraad, told me in strict confidence. I suppose you know Hans Heimann, who was schoolmaster at Pampoenpoort? Although he is a German by birth, he was baptized in our church and duly confirmed, so that he is a full member. You may also have heard that there was a charge of misconduct against him. Well, he was summoned to appear before the Kerkraad yesterday, to answer for his sins, and duly put in an appearance when his name was called out.

"When he went into the vestry, where the Raad met, he carried with him a small basket, which he

placed on the ground. The Predikant, in the usual manner, explained to Hans the nature of the charge against him, and asked what he had to say about it.

“He looked at the members of the Raad and asked permission to put a question. When this was granted, he asked them whether any one present could tell him why Jerusalem was such a clean town.

“Man, that was a poser! None of the old Boers there could answer him,—not even the Predikant. He then said that since none of them could answer him, he would do so himself. ‘Jerusalem was a clean town, because each one there swept before his own door, and that if the Raad meant to sweep before his door, he had a few choice brooms up his sleeve with which to sweep before the doors of most of the members.’ Neef Willem said one could cut the silence that followed, and it seemed to him that each member had something to fear that Hans might perhaps have got wind of. Even the Predikant became visibly nervous, and began to stammer out that they were not there to answer irrelevant questions, and that if he had any charge to make against any member of the Raad, he could do so in the proper way, and it would be dealt with in due course.

“Hans replied that his future actions would depend upon their present behaviour. If they left him in peace, he would do the same to them, otherwise, however, the world would soon have something to talk about.

“As the Predikant seemed too weak to rule the situation, old Oom Carl van der Merwe, the oldest member present, got angry, and said the Raad was

insulted, and he proposed to deal with the subject before them at once, and that Hans Heimann should be taught to behave himself and respect the church.

"Hans thereupon lost his temper, and, snatching up his basket, emptied the contents upon the table round which the Raad was sitting. The basket was full of stones, and when the heap was deposited he said to them :

" ' Here am I, and there are stones—if any of you think himself without sin, take up the stones, and throw them at me. I promise I shall not move or retaliate in any way, for I wish to know which of you is perfect.' "

Oom Willem Botha guffawed loudly, for having been a member of the Kerkraad himself, he knew with what solemnity the meetings were conducted, and the absurdity of the incident therefore appealed very strongly to him.

Gijs and Wijnand also laughed heartily, and by their merriment attracted a small crowd, inquisitive to know what the fun was about. Needless to say that confidence was also extended to the newcomers, with the result that the story spread like wildfire.

"Did any of them throw stones at Hans?" queried one of the crowd.

"Not likely," replied Oom Willem, with a knowing laugh. "But the meeting broke up in disorder. The Predikant strutted home in disgust, declaring that his cloth had been grievously insulted; the elders vowed they would for ever excommunicate Hans, while the younger deacons disappeared round corners to give vent to their suppressed merriment."

A chorus of laughter testified to the appreciation of Oom Willem's story, and each hurried back to his waggon to repeat the joke to all and sundry who had not yet heard it.

In a small town with very little excitement in it, an episode like this soon becomes known, and before noon it was public property. Everywhere in the streets, shops and hotels, little clusters of people collected to discuss and laugh over the strange occurrence. Whenever any of the Raad members appeared some irresponsible youngster would make a veiled allusion to stone-throwing, which would cause renewed merriment at the expense of the unfortunate pillar of the Church. The question that exercised most people's minds was what the Kerkraad would do next, and whether the Predikant would make reference to the matter in his sermon.

The Raad was bound to vindicate its high office, in order to maintain its dignity, as the precedent established by Hans would be damning to its future authority, if left undisturbed. That the Predikant would denounce such conduct from the pulpit in the approved ecclesiastical fashion, seemed certain, and everybody decided to go to church to hear.

As a rule, church business commenced on Friday previous to Nachتماال, and continued until Saturday night. The method of raising church funds is by holding an annual bazaar, to which not only the congregation, but strangers as well, are requested to contribute.

It is surprising what large sums of money are raised by these bazaars, even when everybody complains of bad times. The Predikant is an

expert in impressing upon the minds of the congregation the fact that everything they possess belongs to the Lord, no matter how hard they worked for it ; and that nothing pleases the Almighty more than substantial donations towards the support of the church, which, translated into every-day language, means the salary of the minister.

And indeed, it is absolutely necessary that large sums should be realized by these bazaars, for the Dutch parson is a highly-paid official, and loves to live on the fat of the land. His house—"De Pastorie," as it is called—must be the best and handsomest in the town, although he pays neither rates nor rent for it. His trap and horses must be of the shiniest, for he could not possibly consent to avail himself of the humble ass for the purposes of locomotion. These needs the congregation must supply either directly or indirectly ; besides a number of other perquisites and privileges.

His contract with the congregation is a most unjust and one-sided business, for, should he feel so minded, he can leave them in the lurch at any time, by simply announcing from the pulpit his intention of going elsewhere, and should a call from any other town come, offering higher pay and better material advantages, then it is clearly the will of the Lord that he should go to minister to the souls there ; and the Lord's will must be done in such cases, in spite of there being so many other needy souls to minister to near by.

One Predikant, on being asked how he knew it was the Lord's will that he should accept a call that came to him, answered that " the Lord knew that he

required a higher salary, and therefore sent the call to him."

When, however, a call comes with the offer of a smaller salary, it is usual to announce that a call has been received, but after prayerful consideration, it has had to be declined.

In some cases when a call with increased emoluments has been received, the Predikant lays the matter before the Kerkraad, and a discussion follows. Should the Kerkraad wish to retain the particular Predikant, they raise his salary and make it equal to the new offer ; then it is considered that the Lord has changed His mind, but if the Raad cannot come up to the offer made, then there is no help for it, and the Divine will carries the day.

It is most amusing to listen to a farewell sermon from a Predikant, who has just received a higher pay call. With tears in his eyes, and a great show of emotion, he recounts the good work he has done in the congregation, and thanks them for the great support he has received in his labours. He has learned to love them dearly and feels his parting from them deeply, but he must obey the will of the Lord. Nevertheless, the memory of the good and the love he has received from them will strengthen him in his future work.

Meanwhile, a number of women begin to sob, and several men wipe their noses vigorously, especially the elders and deacons, while all over the congregation there is a flourish of handkerchiefs, until one is surprised that the Lord could ever be so heartless as to part such loving hearts in a world already overflowing with sorrow.

It is, however, vastly different when the congregation for some reason or other wish to get rid of their Predikant. There is no such thing as giving his reverence notice to quit. He simply sticks on, and although the church may be empty and great dissatisfaction prevail amongst the congregation, he nevertheless refuses to vacate the pulpit in favour of another and more deserving pastor, no matter how many precious souls may be lost in the meantime. The only way to convince his reverence that it is really the Divine will that he should make a move, is to buy him out, and if sufficient money is forthcoming the argument becomes insurmountable and he bends to higher powers.

Punctually at ten o'clock, the ladies' bazaar was opened with a short prayer by one of the visiting ministers. It was held in the only hall the town boasted, which did duty for all public functions, such as meetings, auctions, wedding feasts, concerts, and Circuit Court sessions. There were contributions of every conceivable description; clothes, fancy work, fineries, flowers, toys, delectable dainties from the animal and vegetable kingdom, with liquid refreshments, hot and cold.

The hall being small and the crowd great, the members had to elbow their way to the tables as best they could. There was a continual hum of voices, for all were talking at the same time, bargaining, selling and buying, eating and drinking, and generally enjoying themselves, while all the time money was rolling into the church coffers.

By twelve o'clock the crowd was getting thinner, as people began to struggle home with their pur-

chases. At one o'clock the hall was empty, everything having been sold out.

The men's bazaar was held in the afternoon on the market square, and consisted of cattle, sheep and other stock, as well as a variety of farm produce. These were all sold to the highest bidder by the local auctioneer, who as a rule conducted these sales gratuitously, with an eye to public favour and future support, and by way of contribution to the church.

If the auctioneer knew his work, he began by putting the crowd in a good humour. This was generally effected by offering the smallest and poorest lamb or sucking pig that could be found, and on which the most extravagant praises were showered in real auctioneering clap-trap. It was then put up and bids invited. As often as not, it would be bought and given back to be put up again, by almost every one, until at length the auctioneer got tired of it; then he bought it himself, and sent it away. In this way a sucking pig has often realized twenty to twenty-five pounds.

"Come on, friends!" shouted the auctioneer, after having disposed of a lamb in the manner described, "As we have had our little bit of fun, let us now begin the sale in earnest. In your pockets you will find money. Here am I. Throw it at me. I shall not retaliate."

A roar of laughter from the crowd testified that they understood the reference to Hans Heimann, and throughout the whole sale a torrent of humorous raillery was kept up, until every hoof was sold, and on behalf of the church, the auctioneer dismissed the crowd with thanks.

The Saturday before *Nachtmaal* was by far the busiest day in town, for then farmers coming from a distance had to do their shopping on a large scale, so as to supply all needs on the farm for perhaps a year. Crowds of women were busy inside the shops buying clothes for themselves and children, besides executing commissions for neighbours who could not come themselves.

Outside, the men purchased farm implements, food supplies and, more especially, guns and ammunition. It was understood that residents of the town should do no shopping that day, as they could not expect to be attended to whilst the crush from the country lasted.

Numbers of waggons and Cape carts were drawn up outside the shops to be loaded up, so as to be ready for an early start on Monday morning. Every body was in a hurry, running from one store to another, and even the otherwise sluggish townsman seemed to be infused with new life and vigour, for he too walked faster than usual, for no purpose at all, but simply because he was impelled by the tumult around him.

The Civil Commissioner's clerk was besieged by farmers paying quit-rents, lease-rents and other Government taxes. The Post Office was equally over-crowded, and all were bustling and working at top speed to finish off before night time.

When at last night came, and the weary but happy storekeeper had closed his shutters, the younger generation began to collect in several parties to enjoy themselves, and keep the town alive till late.

On Sunday morning, *Nachtmaal* services com-

menced, and the church was packed to suffocation. The Communion service was read, and this prohibited any one who might be guilty of sin from partaking of the Lord's Supper, "for he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks himself into judgment." Yet, in spite of the prohibition, every one took Sacrament blithely, happy in the consciousness that there were still so many good people in the world.

At the Baptismal Service, which took place in the afternoon, some laughable *contretemps* sometimes occurred, and as laughing in church was considered most unpardonable behaviour, it often became difficult to witness the scenes enacted and at the same time keep a serious face.

Some of the poorer farmers, especially the by-woner class who lived at great distances from town, hardly ever had an opportunity of attending church, and thus it frequently happened that when the journey to the dorp could be undertaken there were quite a number of children in each family to be christened. When the parents were called up to take their places before the font it was nothing to see each mother walking up the aisle with five or six little mites hanging on to her skirts.

Generally the bigger children began to cry, and at once set off the smaller ones, for, not understanding the nature of the ceremony, and puzzled by the solemnity observed, they took fright at the crowd of faces staring at them, and dreaded especially any close proximity to the Predikant.

By some strange whim of nature we are so constituted that while in church, or, for the matter of that, any place where laughing is considered out of

place, the least funny incident keenly excites our risibility, and the more we try to repress the feeling the more uncontrollable the impulse becomes.

That afternoon, twelve couples answered the call to the font, bringing with them twenty-six children to be baptised. As the space before the pulpit was rather cramped, the children soon got themselves hopelessly mixed, and the parents had a great to-do in sorting them out, and keeping them in their proper places.

While the prescribed ritual was read, which occupied about a quarter of an hour, the parents were expected to stand reverently before the pulpit, and to make certain declarations of faith, before the church could take the babes into its fold.

The Predikant had read for several minutes when some of the children began to chatter.

"Ma," shouted a small boy at the top of his voice, "fasten my pants, they are falling off."

"Hush, child! The Predikant will be angry." The mother spoke in an undertone, and pointed to the minister in the pulpit.

"But what will he say if my pants come off?" persisted the little one anxiously.

"Hush, hush. He will come down and beat you."

This frightened the child, who began to yell lustily. "Fasten my pants! Fasten my pants, before he comes down!" he cried.

Here and there a titter became audible from some child in the audience, which was immediately suppressed by its elders, and all round smiles rippled over the solemn features of the worshippers.

The whole group of children before the pulpit now

became frightened, fearing that the Predikant would come down, when something dreadful was sure to happen to them; they consequently gave vent to their fears by setting up such a chorus of howls that the Predikant stopped reading.

His reverence tactfully requested the congregation to sing a hymn while the parents tried to pacify their alarmed offspring.

The hymn seemed to soothe the little ones, for quietness was again restored and the reading was resumed. It was, however, not long before a child of about eight years addressed her mother in a loud stage whisper.

“Ma, why is that Oom talking such a lot?” referring to the reader.

The mother bent down and whispered something in the child’s ear, but the other little ones who overheard the question now all wanted an answer from their respective parents, and things promised to become lively again, when the minister, who omitted a great portion of the ritual, suddenly stopped, and began putting the three questions to the parents.

First :—“Although our children are conceived in sin, and therefore subject to damnation, do you acknowledge that they are sanctified in Christ, and, as such, should be baptised as members of the congregation?”

Second :—“Do you acknowledge that the doctrines contained in the Old and New Testament and in the Articles of Faith taught in this church, are the true and complete teaching of salvation?”

Third :—“Do you promise to instruct your

children, or cause or assist them to be instructed in the above doctrine? ”

The parents having all nodded assent, the Predikant descended from the pulpit to baptise the children in the name of the Holy Trinity.

The little ones, who were still noisy, saw the minister descending and construed it into an open declaration of war.

The small man of the pants was the first to show the white feather, as, with a loud scream, he made a bolt for the church door, running down the aisle as fast as his sturdy legs would carry him.

His flight struck panic into the hearts of the other children and a general stampede followed. At the door a burly old sexton intercepted their progress and waved them back again.

Mothers and fathers ran in pursuit, but the hero of the pants refused firmly to make the acquaintance of the Minister, and had to be carried to the font, screaming and kicking. His example was followed by several of the others, and the sight of a number of irritated parents carrying their expostulating infants to the font proved too much for every one. The whole congregation laughed outright.

Even the Predikant, good man that he was, was struck with the absurdity of the situation and smiled wanly.

When at last the little crowd regathered, and began to realise that the Predikant had no sinister motives against their persons, quietness was restored and the Sacrament proceeded.

The first to be presented was a boy of six. The Predikant repeated the usual formula, dipped his

fingers into the water, and touched the child's forehead.

As he did so, the boy turned indignantly to his mother and wailed: "Ma, the Oom is throwing water in my face!"

Backing away from the font he eluded the grip on his arm, and had to be retrieved from the recesses of a distant pew to be touched with water twice more.

"My face is clean!" he whimpered, miserably, "I don't want it washed!"

It was a relief to all when the children were safely baptised, and when, fifteen minutes later, the people streamed out of church, the casual looker-on might well have thought he was watching a theatre-audience dispersing.

Such christenings are very rare in these days, and now that the Karroo is dotted all over with villages the church is within reach of all.

CHAPTER VI

ANDRIES WITTE

TANTE LET and her friends had dutifully taken part in every function and service in connection with Nachtmaal, and felt relieved and happy when it was all over.

The bazaar had been a splendid success. Sufficient money was realised to pay the Predikant's salary for the year, and there remained a good balance to go towards the sustentation fund.

The church had already a substantial income from ground rents, and amounts fixed on mortgage of farm property, but not quite sufficient to meet all the various expenditure incidental to the upkeep of such an establishment, without the aid of an annual bazaar.

Most of the Karroo towns were originally laid out by the Dutch Reformed Church. As the Karroo became more and more inhabited, and farms were acquired from the Government, at great distances from the nearest towns, the Church wisely followed in the wake of the people, by purchasing a farm as central as possible to the new section requiring a minister. This farm was then surveyed into erven, from which sites were selected for church, school and public buildings, and the rest offered for sale, subject

to a yearly tax payable to the Church. By the sale of the erven the purchase price of the farm was usually well covered, and a fairly good annual income in taxes secured for Church purposes.

As soon as a little township had sprung up, the Government was petitioned for a lock-up, and a special Justice of the Peace with jurisdiction to try petty cases. Should the town grow in importance, the Government would be further persuaded to grant it a periodical Court, which would eventually ripen into a Resident Magistracy. Once a Resident Magistrate's Court was established, an area was cut off from the surrounding districts, and a new fiscal division proclaimed with the town as its capital.

All these various steps were brought about by the influence of the Church, and when the town had grown to such an extent that the Kerkraad could no longer control it, a public meeting would be held to discuss the advisability of having a Municipality proclaimed. Then, when this body was formed, the Church could hand over to it the management of the town, and be relieved from all other responsibility, retaining, however, its right to Church taxes as well as its ownership in the Commonage, until bought out by the Municipality.

In this way the Dutch Church has become a wealthy and self-supporting institution, so that, even although the Government subsidy has long since been withdrawn, it has continued to grow in influence and power, and has done perhaps more than any other Church to advance education in South Africa.

Early on Monday morning, the general exodus

from the town commenced. Long before daylight wheels began to rumble through the streets, as waggons and carts started on their long homeward journey over the scorching Karroo, and, by noon, the town was quiet, and began to settle down to the habitual humdrum inactivity.

Tante Let and her party had agreed to stay over until Wednesday morning, in order to do their shopping and business when the crush was over, and to call upon their town friends, whom they only had the opportunity of seeing once every two or three years.

As Tante Let very seldom came to town, her cottage was always let, but subject to the condition that at *Nachtmaal* time the tenant had to vacate it for a week, and give her the use of the furniture, in consideration whereof one month's rent was remitted.

As this agreement suited the tenant, Tante Let always stayed a full week, unless urgent matters necessitated her leaving sooner. During her stay the cottage was always full of acquaintances, who came to see her, and discuss matters that had happened since their last meeting.

On Monday morning she remained at home to greet friends, and take a rest from the excitement of the past few days. Among those who came to see her was a man with whom she had but a passing acquaintance, but whose reputation she knew to be such that she had no desire for his company. Why he should have called upon her she could not guess, as neither she nor any of her friends had encouraged intimacy with him or his family. She there-

fore ascribed his call to the prevailing custom amongst Boers of presuming upon a slight acquaintance to claim kinship, and, as such, she dismissed the matter from her mind, resolving, however, to keep him at a respectable distance.

In a very pleasant manner he came up to her and extended his hand.

“Good-morning, Tante Let; I am glad to see that you are one of those sensible people who do not run out of town as soon as the church doors close. Life is already such a rush that one may well take things a bit easy.”

“Good-morning, Mr. Witte. Please be seated,” she replied rather stiffly.

She was purposely formal in her reply, for having been addressed as “Tante,” it was to be expected that she would respond by using the familiar “Neef,” but this she refrained from doing, in order to make him feel that she did not include him in her circle of friends.

When Boer calls Boer “Mr.” or “Mijnheer” it is a clear sign that the two are strangers to each other,—that friendly intercourse between them has ceased to exist.

Andries Witte was also a farmer, and lived about two hours’ drive from the town, where he had a beautiful farm, “Rietkuil.” This farm, however, did not belong to him, but to his father-in-law—Koos Hough—who was acknowledged by all to be the richest man in the district.

Andries Witte had only one object in life—to become a rich man, and to attain that object he allowed nothing to stand in his way. Being pleasant

in manner and smooth of tongue, he succeeded in winning the love of Koos Hough's daughter, Anna, whom he married, when she was only eighteen years old.

It did not take his wife long to awake from her dream of love. From the first year of their married life, Witte began to worry her to obtain large sums of money from her father. These she succeeded in obtaining under promise of repayment with interest, and handed to her husband, who always had some money-making scheme on hand, for which he required capital, and which, in his persuasive manner, he assured her would double and treble the amount in a short time, whereby they would be enabled not only to repay the loan, but acquire a large capital of their own

His schemes, however, never reached maturity, as some unforeseen accident always upset the machinery; nevertheless the money had been spent, and unless more capital was forthcoming the amount already invested would be lost.

In this manner Witte again and again persuaded his wife to obtain loans from her father, until that worthy became suspicious, and gave his daughter to understand that he was not an unlimited banking institution, and that in future Witte would have to apply somewhere else for financial assistance.

From that moment Witte became cold and harsh to his wife, and did not scruple to voice his disappointment at her inability to get more money from her father. "What is the good," he would say in his anger, "of having married a rich man's daughter, if she is not able to get money whenever it is wanted?"

Mrs. Witte received the blow in silence, though it rankled deep. Five years had elapsed since she married Witte, but those five years were amongst the happiest of her life, for she loved her husband, and thought that she was all in all to him, as he had so often assured her. The truth, however, gradually dawned upon her that he had married her for her prospects, and though she had put the thought away from her as unjust to him, now that he plainly told her he had married her simply in order that she might extort money from her parents, it came like a dagger to her heart, that killed, not her body, but her soul, her life,—her love.

At first her father did not ask for any written acknowledgment of the money advanced, but, as Witte had repeatedly failed to repay any of the loans when due, he one day sent for her, and told her to get acknowledgments, signed by her husband, for the money which was owing.

When Anna mentioned her father's request to Witte, there was a terrible scene. He stormed at her, and swore that he would not be such a fool as to put his hand to paper for any man, much less her father, to whose "meanness" in refusing to supply him with further capital he ascribed the failure of his schemes.

From that day Witte openly insulted his wife, and threatened to add injury to the slights he daily heaped upon her. A week or so later he carried his threat into execution by striking her a blow in the face for some trivial thing she had said.

She had stood all his abuse and buried her sorrow in her heart, but the blow awakened her pride. She

said nothing by way of reproach but went straight out of the house, and ordered the stable boy to inspan the cart.

With the assistance of her housemaid she hurriedly packed a few boxes with the most needful clothing for herself and her two little children, and ordered the servant to put them in the cart. Then, calling the children, she took them by the hand.

As she was climbing into the cart, Witte, who was sitting in the house, pretending that he did not know what was going on, came out and demanded to know what she was about.

She turned and faced him.

"I thought you were a man," she said, "but I find you are only a coward. You have ruined my life, but, God helping me, you shall not spoil the lives of these innocent children with your profane and godless behaviour."

Witte turned purple with rage, and began to curse and rave, shouting to her to get out of the cart immediately. But Anna flicked the horses smartly, and they dashed away from the farm.

Two hours later she was under her father's roof, telling everything to her parents.

Old Koos Hough took his daughter in his arms, and kissed her tenderly, as he assured her, in a broken voice, that she had done right in coming home. "Here you will be safe from that brute! Take your old place in the house. You are very welcome, and the children will be the sunshine of our hearts."

Anna never returned to her husband, and steadily declined in health, until at last she died, from sheer inability to struggle on and face her sorrow

As it was by that time three years since Witte last saw his wife to speak to, he did not dare attend the funeral, nor did he attempt to obtain the custody of the children, well knowing that his implacable father-in-law would not give them up without the intervention of the law. Besides being indebted to him for over five thousand pounds, he feared that any reprisals on his part would result in old Koos Hough calling in the money. And to a man like Witte, money is a far more desirable asset than children.

Since his wife left him he had carried on all manner of speculative transactions, whereby he gradually became richer at the expense of many people who had trusted him, until at last he found it difficult to inveigle any one who knew him into financial dealings.

He was one of those artful people who always cover up their tracks adroitly, and in no single instance had the law put a finger on him, for, no matter what might happen, he was always able to establish his own innocence, despite the fact that he was the only one benefited.

All this Tante Let knew, in common with the whole district, and consequently she had no desire to cultivate a closer acquaintance with the man. She had given Gijs instructions to keep Witte at arm's length, and never on any pretext whatever to have anything to do with him.

Witte took the seat offered him, and began to converse pleasantly with the company present, on topics of general interest. He was a good conversationalist, and had the enviable faculty of keep-

ing his listeners interested in any subject he might touch upon. Any one who did not know his reputation would be charmed with him, and even his detractors were bound to admit his attractiveness.

One by one the callers began to leave, until all had gone, and still Witte remained, to the dismay of Tante Let, who longed to see the last of him. She very soon perceived—for she was a woman of keen acumen—that he had something to say to her, and to her alone, and thinking that the sooner it was said the sooner would the unwelcome visitor depart, she made an excuse to send Nettie, who was in the room, to attend to some household duty in the kitchen.

No sooner had Nettie left the room than Witte turned to Tante Let and said: "I had intended going over to Sterkfontein to see you, but as I heard that you were coming into town for Nachemaal, I thought I would call on you here instead."

"What do you wish to speak to me about, Mr. Witte?" Tante Let's manner became very curt, for she disliked the man.

"Something that would be greatly to your advantage, and I should like to explain the matter carefully, if you have a few minutes to spare?"

"I have time now to listen," she replied, shortly.

Although she wished him far enough away, she considered it best to give him the opportunity he sought, so that he might have no possible excuse for calling upon her again.

"The fact is, I am representing a company formed to buy up good farms hereabout, and am able to

obtain more than twice the ordinary market value, but naturally the farm must be exceptionally prolific, either in crops or stock, otherwise my company will not so much as look at it. I have already acquired six good ones, but I must secure at least ten or twelve. Now, your Sterkfontein is one of the best properties in the district, and if you are willing to sell, I guarantee that you will get at least three times its value."

"If that is what you came to see me about, Mr. Witte, you can spare yourself all future trouble. Sterkfontein is not for sale."

"Don't say that, Tante Let. You don't know what a golden opportunity I am putting in your way. There is absolutely no risk or trouble in the whole matter. You will have your money down before you leave the farm."

"Please say no more about it, Mr. Witte," said Tante Let, decisively. "I shall never sell Sterkfontein, even if I am offered five times what it is worth, and you will do me a favour if you never mention the subject to me again."

"Of course, I sprung the matter upon you too suddenly—I quite appreciate that. I scarcely expected any other answer," returned Witte, getting up from his chair. "Think it over, and give me a chance to go into all details. An opportunity such as this offer undoubtedly is comes one's way only once in a lifetime."

Tante Let said no more, and walked towards the front door pointedly. Witte mechanically followed and took his departure. As he walked away a frown settled on his forehead, and he muttered to himself :

"You have shown me the door to-day, but ere long I shall show you the road leading from Sterkfontein."

In the afternoon Tukie was delighted to see Tante Let, accompanied by Mrs. Brandt and Nettie, walk into his shop. He regarded them as old and reliable customers, who not only bought a great deal, but always paid cash for their purchases.

In a moment, seats were provided for the ladies, and Tukie was standing before them rubbing his hands and smiling genially, while his tongue was continually wagging on matters which he thought might interest them.

"I hope, ladies, I shall be able to sell you a lot of things to-day," he said, waving his hands over the shelves.

"There has been such a run on your goods during the last few days that I am sure you have nothing left worth buying," observed Nettie.

"Nothing worth buying? What you think?" Tukie lowered his voice to a confidential whisper. "That's where you make the mistake. We never sell our best stuff to come-and-go customers. When the Nachتماال rush is on we get rid of all our old stock, but always keep our choicest goods for our fixed customers. What you think?"

"What I think," replied Nettie, "is that you must be very rich already."

Tukie threw up his arms with a gesture of sublime despair.

"Rich!" he exclaimed. "Why, I am selling cheaper than anybody else, and pay more for produce. I am a poor man, very poor. What you think?"

The ladies took his assurances for what they were worth, and began their shopping. It was late at night before they finished, and even then there were still several articles to be obtained from other stores, which Tukie did not have in stock.

Brandt, Venter and Gijs were busy buying farming implements and other necessities, including large supplies of ammunition, and, at Tante Let's special instructions, Gijs selected a rifle as a present for Piet from his mother, nor were his clasp knife and other commissions forgotten.

When, the following day, the waggon was loaded again, there was even less room for the human freight than before.

Tukie was in good spirits, for he had done well that Nachtmaal, and did not forget to make Tante Let and her friends liberal presents, after they had settled their accounts. When they left the shop, he ordered his clerk to send each a few bottles of brandy and wine, with his compliments, "in case they might require it in times of sickness on the farms."

CHAPTER VII

A PREMONITION

ON Wednesday afternoon there was quite a large gathering at Tante Let's house to bid her good-bye. Even the Predikant and his wife came over to see her off, for Tante Let was a staunch church member, and not only contributed largely to its funds but, whenever she visited the town, the Predikant's larder was replenished with biltong, butter, huge loaves of Boer bread, and dried sausages.

Biltong and dried sausages are comestibles which only the Boer woman can prepare. They are the despair of the professional butcher, with all his variety of polonies and richly flavoured meats, and the highest salaried chef is unable to produce a delicacy to equal them.

During her stay in town Nettie had received marked attention from a young man named Kemp, a prominent lawyer and auctioneer.

He had contrived to monopolize as much of her company as time would permit during those busy, rushing days, and was present to see her off. He had asked her acceptance of a small parcel, as he stood in earnest conversation with her whilst the others were taking their seats in the waggons.

“ I intend visiting an outlying farm in the district one day soon,” said Kemp off-handedly, as he bade Du Plessis good-bye, “ and shall do myself the pleasure of looking in on you, if I may ? ”

“ Certainly, certainly,” answered Du Plessis. “ You will be very welcome, but you must take things just as you find them, for, on farms, we cannot come up to your town style.”

Kemp laughed pleasantly as he made a tactful reply, and his eyes sought Nettie’s.

Gijs and Wijnand, with no small chagrin, had noticed what was going on during the last few days, though neither said a word. Now, however, their eyes met, with a world of meaning in them, and for the first part of the journey both were silent and preoccupied.

Nettie could not fail to notice their mood, and with womanly instinct she divined the cause. She did not wish to quarrel with them, although her natural vanity was flattered, and she therefore set herself the task of cheering them up, for the genial, pleasant spirit of the little company was drooping under the strain.

She had not yet opened the small parcel, fearing that its contents might be of a variety which might mislead others into thinking that there was a certain amount of tender feeling between herself and Kemp. She had, therefore, to repress her own inquisitiveness until she was alone, although she realised that the mere fact of keeping the contents of the neat package hidden from her companions compromised her still more. It suggested mysterious secrecy—a thing Nettie hated.

"How dull we all are!" she cried, with an obviously forced laugh. "It almost seems as though the dorp had exerted a depressing influence."

"Not so much the town as some of the people who live there," mischievously remarked one of the Coetzee girls, who also had her own ideas as to the cause of the cloud.

"The more reason why we should be happy now that we are away from them," replied Nettie. "I am sure I had my fill of both town and its people, and shall be glad to give them a long rest."

As she said this she glanced at Gij's, and met his gaze, but she also noticed that Wijnand's eyes were upon her with a peculiar searching look.

"I don't know why you should," again interrupted the same girl. "It is not so very obnoxious to visit a town where people are kind, and give one presents."

The colour rose slightly to Nettie's cheeks, but she kept calm, and braved the situation.

"Presents, like trials, come unasked, and the only way to deal with them is to accept them in a proper spirit, and rise above them, as a refusal only adds to the unpleasantness of their bestowal."

This bit of philosophy effectually silenced her tormentor, greatly reassured the two lovers, and in some measure restored the accustomed good humour of the company.

Nettie took the little parcel from her lap, and turning to the Coetzee girl said laughingly.

"I wonder who is the more inquisitive as to its contents—you or I?"

"I?" ejaculated the girl addressed. "I have no desire at all to know what it contains."

"Really, you surprise me," said Nettie. "If you had received a parcel I should be dying with curiosity until you opened it. At any rate, I am going to examine this mysterious bundle now."

She loosened the string carefully, and deliberately opened the paper coverings, exposing to view two very small books in a neat leather case. All eyes were intently watching, as she took out each little book and read their titles, "Hymns and Psalms."

"A very sensible present!" "A beautiful memento!" exclaimed several at the same time.

"A bit of downright impertinence," said Nettie with mock annoyance. "And such a disappointment too! I was hoping to see some beautiful piece of jewelry, and instead of that I get a printed reminder that I am too frivolous. Fancy me—at my time of life, singing hymns and psalms," and she pulled such a wry face that all burst out laughing.

Wijnand, who had now regained his usual bright spirits, immediately brought out his concertina, and began to play the funeral hymn, asking Nettie to sing it without altering the expression of her face.

Gijs, however, interfered, saying that it was always a bad omen to sing funeral hymns; besides, he did not wish sacred hymns to be sung in frivolous moods.

Immediately Nettie changed her expression, and started off with a comic song which all knew, and speedily joined in.

Good feeling being thus restored, the journey proceeded smoothly and pleasantly until late, when the Brak River was reached, and a halt was called for the night's rest.

As soon as the animals were outspanned, the

natives gathered large bundles of wood and dry shrubs, and kindled fires. The women busied themselves roasting meat, making coffee, and preparing the evening repast, while the men arranged the waggon tents, and got ready the bedding for sleeping accommodation.

When all was ready the company gathered round the fire. For the elder people home-made stools were placed, whilst the younger ones contented themselves by squatting on bags and rugs.

To camp out under the stars on a still, fine South African night, and sit around a blazing fire chatting with pleasant companions, is one of the greatest pleasures life has to offer.

Now and again the call of a hunting jackal breaks the silence, then another, and another ; and out beyond the glare of the fire looms the impenetrable blackness and dark spaces of the limitless rolling veld.

The rare far-away baying of a farm watch dog, the faint bleating of sheep straying in the wilderness, and the shrill, piercing cries of some night-bird circling overhead in the dark, seem to accentuate the solemnity of the quiet.

The Milky Way, with its dark patches of illimitable void, the Seven Sisters, and the Southern Cross, contribute to the glory of the midnight sky, and night after night lighten the heavens.

Over the veld, borne on the soft breeze, comes the rich perfume of the avondbloem, insidious and sweet.

It was nearly midnight when the circle round the fire broke up. In the various tents the old people

found beds made for them, the young were prepared to sleep in the open. The servants had orders to call every one as soon as the morning star arose, which would be about an hour before full dawn. This would allow ample time for packing up, coffee drinking and inspanning, before the sun rose.

Gijs had been in bed for three hours when he woke with a curious start. It seemed to him that the air was full of a peculiar noise, low and very haunting. He listened intently. The sound came again—it was the groan of some one in pain.

At first the young man could not locate its direction, but, on getting up, and walking towards the other waggons, he found that the strange sobbing cry came from the spot where the natives were sleeping. Hurrying forward to ascertain what was amiss, and intending to render assistance, he was met by an unusual sight.

The natives were all sitting up in their beds, which were grouped around a smouldering fire, whilst a young Hottentot, named Izaak, one of Venter's servants, was creeping about on all fours like an animal, and groaning at intervals as though his very life was being tortured out of him.

It was dark, and none of the natives saw Gijs, for their attention was rivetted on the boy.

Izaak crept from one corner of his bed to the other restlessly, round and over it, forth and back, occasionally twisting and writhing about in agony, groaning the while miserably.

"Poor child!" ejaculated one of the natives, sympathetically, "Can we do nothing for him?"

"No," said the boy's father, "no, the attack will

pass as it came. Nothing will afford him any relief—we have tried everything.”

“Pitiful!” put in another. “What terrible suffering!”

Gijs, who could not at first understand what was going on, now became alarmed on hearing that Izaak’s antics were due to illness, and, true to his sympathetic nature, at once wanted to do something to help the sufferer.

“What is the meaning of all this, Vaaltyn?” he asked, stepping forward. “Why is Izaak carrying on so strangely?”

“It is an attack, Baas.”

“An attack of what?”

“I don’t know, Baas. He has often had it before, and we can do nothing for him whilst it lasts.”

“Surely something can be done. Where is he suffering pain?”

“He is not suffering any pain, Baas, and as soon as the seizure leaves him he will be all right again.”

“Not in any pain at all!” cried Gijs, in surprise. “You must be mistaken. Just listen to his groans, and watch him crawling about. He ought to have some brandy.”

“It would be of no use, Baas. He won’t take it, and it would be difficult to force it down his throat.” There was infinite sadness in old Vaaltyn’s voice as he spoke.

“But, Vaaltyn, we must do something for him. We cannot let him continue like this without trying to help him.”

"We have tried everything already," repeated Vaaltyn, monotonously.

Gijs, who could bear it no longer, gently caught hold of the boy and tried to hold him quiet in bed, but, to his surprise, found that, although he exerted his utmost strength, he was not able to check a single movement of the frail youth, who flung the Boer aside as though he were a mere child. After some futile struggles Izaak won, and Gijs again turned to Vaaltyn and questioned him.

"How long do these extraordinary attacks last?"

"Sometimes an hour, sometimes longer, Baas."

"And to what do you ascribe them?" Gijs spoke in a mystified voice.

Vaaltyn drew up his shoulders, indicating that he would rather not answer, but, after a moment or two, seeing that Gijs still waited a reply, he went on: "Baas, I do not know what is the real cause of the seizure, for Izaak has been subject to them from birth, but whenever he gets an attack it is immediately followed by bad news."

"Bad news!" repeated Gijs, more astonished than ever. "What sort of bad news?"

"Death!" whispered the old man. "It is a sign of coming death!"

"A death in your family?"

"No, Baas, not necessarily in my family, but of some person whom we know well. He has stopped groaning, so the attack is passing. I have never known it to be quite so severe as it was to-night."

Gijs said nothing, but watched Izaak closely. He was gradually becoming calmer, and after crawling a few times about his bed he collapsed suddenly

and lay inert and still. Vaaltyn gently placed him in a comfortable position, and covered him up.

"He will now sleep soundly, Baas, and to-morrow will know nothing of what has happened. If we were to tell him of this, he would not believe us."

"And do you really think that a death will occur soon?"

"Yes, Baas."

"Vaaltyn, I want you and the other boys to say nothing to anybody—it would only upset the women."

"We never on any account speak of it, Baas."

Gijs went back to bed, but not to sleep. He had often heard of premonition of death amongst natives, but had never come across an instance within his own personal experience. The incident, therefore, made a deep impression on his mind, and he could not forget. He tried to console himself with the thought that Hottentots are known to be a most superstitious race, who look upon any out-of-the-way occurrence as a sign of warning that something is going to happen.

Hottentots do not acknowledge coincidences. If anything occurs after one of their signs, it is sufficient proof of the efficacy of the sign, just as the absence of the expected result is ascribed to the beneficent intervention of the Deity.

For all that, Gijs felt ill at ease. Izaak's attack was of such a strange and awe-inspiring nature, that it might forebode evil of any sort, although he found it hard to believe that the young Hottentot could be gifted, or cursed, with a sense of prophecy.

He determined not to mention the matter to any of his fellow-travellers, but to watch for results.

As sleep was entirely banished from his eyes, it seemed an age before the morning star rose above the horizon. When at length it did put in an appearance the native boys began to stir. Soon a fire was lit, and the kettle put on to prepare coffee. One of the natives went the round of the sleepers to wake them in obedience to his orders, and within five minutes all were up, performing their morning ablutions and getting ready for the homeward journey.

Gijs noticed that, though all the boys were busy about the waggons, they did not waken Izaak—whose duty it was to carry coffee to the various tents—but left him sleeping until it was time to inspan, when Vaaltyn went to wake him with a piece of bread and a cup of coffee.

Izaak jumped up when his father called him, and enjoyed the coffee and bread, as though nothing had happened. He was told to hurry up and assist in getting the animals together for inspanning, which he did with such cheerfulness as to belie all knowledge of his nocturnal suffering.

Gijs was amazed at seeing the young native so alert and smiling, for he made sure that Izaak would be peevish and ill, or at least show some after-effects of the attack.

As soon as it was light enough to see clearly, the journey was resumed. An early start was necessary, for it was still a good day's journey to reach Sterkfontein before nightfall, with heavy loaded waggons.

Du Plessis with his wife and Tante Let in his cart, proposed to go ahead, as he wished to call at a wayside farm, some miles off the road, to see some friends, and promised to rejoin the party some time during the afternoon at a certain spot indicated. As his horses were fresh, he soon left the waggons behind and disappeared in the distance.

Those who know how to work with oxen, believe it to be bad to keep them in the yoke longer than an hour and a half for the first stage in the morning. The shorter the morning "schoft" (as the Dutch term a stage), the better the animal will be able to work during the rest of the day. It was therefore hardly yet time for breakfast, when the first halt was called to outspan the oxen.

Water is not plentiful in the Karroo, and travellers have to arrange their stages so as to reach water at suitable intervals, and often a full day's journey has to be made from one watering-place to another.

While breakfast was being prepared, the boys drove the oxen to the water, which was some distance from the waggons, over a low rise. No sooner had the natives come to its crest than Izaak rushed back, while the other natives squatted down low to ground, hiding themselves, apparently, from something on the other side.

Izaak ran to his master and told him that there was a large flock of wild ostriches grazing near the water, within easy range from the summit of the hill.

Immediately the sporting spirit in every man present was aroused, but alas! there was only one

gun—the one bought by Tante Let as a present for Piet.

Jumping on the waggon and fumbling about as he shifted the parcels and bags, Gijs at last fished out the gun and some ammunition.

Brandt, being the oldest among the company, and very famous for the deadliness of his aim, was offered the gun. He took it protesting that he did not wish to deprive the younger fellows of the chance offered, but all insisted that he should have first try at the birds as he was the surest shot.

The old sportsman's eyes shone with excitement as he took the gun and threw it up to test the sights.

"Does it shoot high or low, Gijs?"

"I really don't know, Oom Jan. I had no time to try it on the day mother bought it. It was selected solely by appearance."

"Well, I can see that it is likely to shoot low, for the sight is so high. I shall therefore try to cover my game entirely."

And away he trotted to the spot where the patient natives were still squatting, closely followed at the heel by Izaak, and, at some distance, by the other men, who were eager to see the sport. When he reached the natives, they pointed to the spot where the birds were, and as it was near the top of the rise, he took off his hat and walked on carefully, watching intently for the first glimpse of the quarry.

Suddenly Brandt bent down and retraced his steps until he reached the other men.

"It is impossible to reach them from this rise as they have retreated from the oxen and are now beyond range," he said. "There is another kopje

close on the other side of them, and we shall have to circumvent them. As we cannot afford to lose too much time here," he continued, "it must be done quickly, and one of you young fellows had better take the gun."

Gijs and Wijnand accordingly agreed to go round the ostriches to get a shot at them, and promised not to lose any time, while Brandt said he would watch from the rise, and in the event of their killing any he would come with the cart.

The two started off at right angles to the birds, and had to make a great detour to reach the kopje, and remain out of sight all the time.

The wild ostrich of the Karroo is the most difficult of all game to approach. Having a very long neck and being exceptionally keen sighted, it has the advantage of a greater range of vision than other animals. It is so timid, that it takes to flight at the merest suspicion of danger, and once started, does not stop running until several miles have been covered.

But the Boer is an expert in the art of stalking game, and despite the alertness of the ostrich, it is very often outwitted and falls to his unerring aim.

Of all game the ostrich is the Boer's favourite quarry. It requires more time and ingenuity to stalk, and on account of its long legs is very deceptive to shoot at, but when once bagged it repays all trouble. Its feathers are always in demand by produce buyers and bring good prices, while its flesh is considered a great delicacy.

After waiting for about half an hour, Brandt heard a shot and saw a bird drop. The flock

scattered at once in flight, but a few seconds later a second shot sounded, and another bird was added to the bag. Still another shot and another, but without effect, as the birds were by that time a great way off and running at full speed—a speed which equals that of a racehorse.

As promised, Brandt got the cart ready, and went to fetch the birds that were shot. He knew that it would mean at least an hour's delay, and that it would be quite dark by the time they reached home, but it was out of the question to leave the game, so he hurried the horses on, as fast as he could, over the low shrubby bushes and stones.

When he arrived the hunters had already taken out the entrails of the ostriches and prepared them for loading up. They were beautiful specimens, and showed a fine crop of prime feathers. It took all the strength of the three men combined to lift each bird into the cart, and when both were loaded up, it was as much as two horses could do to pull through the veld.

Gijs had insisted upon Wijnand taking the gun and shooting, so that he was the hero of the day, which gave him the right to select the best plume from each bird. This he did as soon as they reached the waggon, with a great show of importance, by carefully examining each feather, until his choice was made. Then, turning to Nettie, he presented the plumes to her with a low bow, saying: "Will your ladyship deign to accept this trophy of the chase from our mutual friend Gijs?"

"From me?" interrupted Gijs. "Why, you

are the hero in this affray. It is due to your skill that the presentation can be made at all."

"Well, it was only your unselfishness that gave me the chance of bringing down this veteran of the flats," laughed Wijnand.

Nettie took the plumes from the young man's hand and said smilingly, "I accept them as a gift from you both, and I shall wear them in remembrance of David and Jonathan."

Those who had not yet breakfasted made a hasty meal, whilst the natives inspanned the oxen and prepared to start.

Vaaltyn, who was still on the waggon tying up the birds, looked ahead down the road and exclaimed that he saw a man on horseback coming towards them at full gallop. Shading his eyes with his hands he gazed intently at the approaching rider, who was still two miles away. Then, suddenly, jumping off the waggon, he went up to Gijs and said in a low undertone, so low that the others could not hear: "Baas, this man riding towards us at such speed is your old servant Jantje, and he is mounted on Prince! Something bad has happened."

CHAPTER VIII

DEATH

PRINCE, a young stallion that Gijs had lately bought and broken in, was kept in the stable solely for his master's use. No one but Gijs had ever mounted Prince before, and none of the servants would have dared to do so, unless specially ordered, for it was an unwritten law that a young Boer's stable horse was kept exclusively for the use of its particular owner. It was only dire necessity that would compel even a bosom friend to ask for the loan of another's fancy horse.

For a servant to be seen riding his master's special horse, during his absence, meant a severe thrashing in those days, and was a risk few were venturesome enough to take. When, therefore, a servant did court the certain heavy punishment, there must be some weighty reason for his doing so. Hence Vaaltyn's fear that something terrible had happened. When Gijs understood the import of Vaaltyn's words, he felt quite dazed for the moment. His first impulse was anger that his horse should be ridden during his absence, but, in a flash, the fact dawned upon him that Jantje was too faithful a servant to break a command, unless

circumstances over which he had no control compelled him, and besides, the Hottentot was riding fast, and in the direction from which he expected his master.

For a few seconds Gijs stood undecided what to do, then he went over to Brandt, who was already sitting on the cart waiting for the waggons to start, and hurriedly explained the position to him.

Brandt suggested driving on ahead of the waggons to meet Jantje and hear the news. Mrs. Brandt and Mrs. Venter were already on the cart, and Gijs jumped in as Brandt started the horses.

As Jantje was approaching at a good speed, they met but a short distance away from the waggons. Gijs alighted just as his servant, who had recognised his master from some distance, reined in.

"What is the matter, Jantje? Why do you race like this?"

Gijs was in a fever of anxiety as he took Prince's reins. The horse's sides were working like a pair of bellows, and his flanks were foam-flecked.

Jantje jumped off as the horse came to a standstill, and going to Gijs threw himself on the ground before his master, and caught hold of his legs with both arms, which, among natives, indicates acute distress.

"Oh, Baas——" began the old Hottentot, but got no further. He burst into a fit of weeping, and continued clinging to his master's legs.

"What is it? Speak, Jantje!" commanded Gijs.

"Oh, Baas, the children!" he managed to sob out.

“The children! Speak, cannot you? I can’t bear this much longer.”

“Klein Baas Piet and Klein Baas Japie——” Again his emotion overcame him and he could not get on.

“Oh, my God! Don’t say that something has happened to them?” cried Mrs. Brandt, who was listening intently.

No sooner was her son’s name mentioned than she turned deadly pale, and hurriedly getting out of the cart ran to Jantje, whom she shook by the shoulders violently enough to make him let go his hampering grip on the young Boer’s legs.

Jantje’s whole frame was shaking with the stress of his feelings. He was obviously trying hard to control himself and speak, though he could not do so with the celerity Mrs. Brandt desired.

“Do speak, Jantje! What is wrong?” She spoke in a coaxing voice.

“Both the children are lost!” he blurted out at length.

“Lost! How can they be lost? Have you searched everywhere? Did you go over to Boshoeck to enquire if they were there? And to all the farms lying beyond?”

“We have looked for them night and day, but can find no trace of them.” Jantje’s outburst of grief having spent itself, he became calmer and spoke coherently. “That is why I came to meet my master, so that he too may come and search.”

Gijs looked at Jantje searchingly. “You are telling lies, Jantje,” he said, curtly.

The Hottentot crouched before his master like

a dog expecting a whipping, as he whimpered half aloud and half to himself, "No, no, Baas. I tell the truth."

"Take Prince and lead him round to get cool."

Still wiping the tears from his eyes, Jantje did as he was told.

In the meantime the waggons had come up with the cart, and all the others grouped themselves round to hear the news.

Brandt had not spoken a word, but was sitting on the cart in deep thought, pulling his black beard. Mrs. Brandt was crying, and Mrs. Venter was doing her best to comfort her by suggesting that the boys had probably gone off to some neighbouring farm and would most likely be back at Sterkfontein by the time the waggons arrived there.

Gijs, however, was not deceived—he knew Jantje too well. If the children were indeed lost, the Hottentot would never have given up the hunt to come and tell his master about it. He would have stuck to the trail like the tracker he was. It was certain, therefore, that the servant was lying when he said he could not find the boys.

Instead of leading the horse around the carts, Jantje walked him away into the veld, giving Gijs a sign to follow. Carefully the young Boer edged away from the group, who were all excitedly discussing the matter, and went after his servant. He had not gone far before he found Wijnand at his side.

"You did not tell me the truth just now, Jantje," said Gijs accusingly.

"No, Baas," was the meek reply.

"Where are the boys?"

"Dead, Baas. They were both murdered yesterday by Bushmen, but I had not the heart to say so before the Ou Nooi."

Gijs, with the recollection of Izaak's strange seizure and Vaaltyn's interpretation of it, strong upon him, was more or less prepared for the worst, but the news staggered him when it came. As for Wijnand, who merely thought that the boys had gone out on some adventurous expedition which had taken them far afield, he was dazed by the shock, and cried in a low, trembling voice: "Murdered! Murdered!"

At that moment the women were all talking together, and fortunately did not catch the sharp exclamation, but Brandt, who sat quietly in the cart, heard it distinctly. Every muscle in his body seemed to relax suddenly, and he felt powerless to lift his head, as it sank lower and lower on his breast. A look of intense distress spread over his face, large tears began to roll down his cheeks, and in the agony of his suffering he left them unwiped.

Nettie, who happened to look at him, saw how white his face had become. She immediately went near to him, and said, tenderly: "Oom Jan, you must not worry about it in the very least. I can tell exactly what has happened. The boys know that we will come home to-night, and mean to have a good supply of game for us. They have gone out after buck and, though they intended to get home in good time, have roamed farther than they thought. I bet you my new hymn and psalm books, with a

kiss into the bargain, that both Piet and Japie will be home when we arrive, and mighty proud to show us all the game they have shot."

She laughed merrily to cheer up the old man and inspire him with hope, although at heart she felt as worried and concerned as the rest.

Brandt, in common with all who knew her, loved Nettie, but at that moment her words, well meant as he knew they were, stabbed him to the heart, and her laugh sounded a mockery. He groaned in reply, and covered his face with his hands.

Gijs and Wijnand were slowly returning to the little company grouped about the cart, not knowing how to break the news to the others. They were spared the pain of doing so by Brandt, who, having pulled himself together, got out of the cart, and throwing the reins to a native, went to his wife. Putting his arm about her he said very gently: "Lenie, death has come to our, and Nicht Let's, house. It is God's will. Let us be still."

"Death!" repeated Mrs. Brandt, her eyes staring uncomprehendingly at her husband. "Who is dead?"

"Be calm, my dear. It has pleased the Lord to take Japie and Piet from our homes."

"It cannot be!" she almost screamed, and then becoming hysterical, she laughed and cried at the same time. "Don't say so. I'll not believe it! It is not true! God could not be so cruel."

Brandt tried to calm her, but she became inert and fell into his arms, fainting. The whole group were moved to tears, except Gijs, who, with a blank

stare, bit his finger nails, as was his custom when in perplexity or distress.

There he stood, to all outward appearance unmoved by the grief around him, but those who understood him and his curious nature, knew that he was suffering the bitterest pangs of sorrow, not only on his own account, but for his mother and the Brandts.

Nettie, who had never seen him under such painful circumstances, thought that he was keeping up appearances for the sake of the little company. Going to him, she took his hand, and pressed it without saying anything at all—a silent sympathy that spoke more than any words.

Gijs suddenly recollected how time was speeding on. Pulling himself together he asked all to take their seats; then, turning to the natives, he bade them hurry forward as fast as the oxen could travel. And as they journeyed, Jantje told his master and Wijnand all he could of the terrible tragedy.

Piet and Japie had gone on a hunting expedition early the previous morning, promising to be back in time for dinner. The dinner-hour came and went, the sun set, and still the boys did not return. Mrs. Van der Vyver, becoming anxious, and fearing that they had met with some accident, sent Jantje in search.

Following up the spoor, the Hottentot came on all that was left of Piet and Japie. It was just dusk as he found the bodies, arrow-stuck, and deprived of all clothing, cut open, too, after the manner of slaughtered sheep. Placed as they were

on the top of some large thickly-growing bushes, it was impossible not to see them, and the arrows, as well as the brutal treatment of the dead, proclaimed at once that Bushmen were the perpetrators of the crime.

Jantje left the bodies where he found them, and ran home to report to Van der Vyver, who felt the blow severely. He could not forget that the children had been left in his charge. As there was nobody to consult Van der Vyver had to act upon his own initiative. He knew that an occurrence of that nature had to be reported to the Field Cornet, and as the official lived many miles away from Sterkfontein, he decided to leave the farm at three o'clock next morning, and get back in time to make arrangements for the funeral. His wife, however, would not rest until Jantje was ordered to take Prince, and ride out to meet the travellers returning from Nachtsmaal.

The recital of Jantje's story was punctuated by exclamations of horror. And every one thought of Tante Let, who had yet to learn of the great sorrow in store for her.

"Who is to tell Tante Let?" asked Wijnand. "It is unthinkable that Gijs should have to do so."

"There are only two others here who could do it," said Venter. "Nettie, or Oom Jan."

"Oh, please don't ask me!" cried Nettie, almost crying as she spoke. "I could not break such news to any one."

Brandt agreed to take the unpleasant task upon himself, and decided to drive ahead to meet Du Plessis's cart at the place agreed upon.

The waggons were now pushed forward as quickly as possible in order to reach the farm early, and the oxen, knowing that their heads were towards the manger, stepped forward briskly.

Arrived at the spot arranged by Du Plessis as a meeting-ground, the caravan found no signs of carts. A native herdsman, tending sheep some distance off, was hailed, and replied that a cart stood for about half an hour before being joined by another, after which the two moved off in the direction of Sterkfontein.

The oxen had been in the yoke since breakfast-time, and Venter suggested a halt, to which Gijs objected, saying that they must go forward. Just as the sun was setting the sad little company arrived at the homestead.

It is astonishing how quickly news spreads in a country where farms are miles and miles apart, and when tidings of sickness or death are received every Boer is ready and anxious to render assistance.

Van der Vyver, on his way to the Field Cornet, had no time to touch anywhere, but mentioned the object of his errand to the few neighbours he met on the road, and through their agency the news spread to such an extent that, when Gijs arrived with the waggons, there was a small crowd of sympathisers standing before the house, whilst a number of women were inside ready to do for Tante Let and the Brandts whatever lay in their power.

Gijs gravely shook hands with all the men, and walked into the house to find his mother. Tante Let was sitting at a little table against the wall, at one side of the dining-room—a place always

occupied by her since she first came to Sterkfontein. Her late husband used to sit directly opposite, but, since his death, Gijs had taken possession of the chair, as his own special sanctum in the house.

The women, sitting around, were talking in undertones, but as soon as Gijs entered, silence fell on all. He walked straight to his mother, threw his arms around her neck, and kissed her.

Neither mother nor son spoke. Words, at that moment, were superfluous, and would have been hopelessly inadequate.

Several of the women began to cry, but never a tear fell from Tante Let's eyes, and the vacant, far-away look in them spoke of a sorrow too deep for expression. Occasionally, when the yearning for her murdered son overcame her, she gasped in the throes of a choking sensation that seemed to grip her by the throat as she struggled with the force that enjoined quiet submission to a Higher Hand, and the human nature that insisted upon open rebellion against the crushing blow.

Wijnand followed Gijs into the house and kissed Tante Let, but left immediately to go on to Boshoeck to assist his father. Nettie had loitered outside, as she thought the meeting, under such tragic circumstances, between a mother and her only son, too sacred to witness.

When she saw Gijs come out of the house, she entered. Tante Let rose in her seat, and opened her arms. Nettie had kept back her tears up to now as well as she could, but as she buried her face on Tante Let's bosom, she cried and cried as though she herself were the principal sufferer. Tante Let

understood, and, kissing the girl on the cheek, said quietly, "Let us be still, my child."

Again the far-away look came into the mother's eyes. "I humble myself before God," she murmured, "because my love for my children has rivalled my love for Him, and He chastiseth me for it, but I know He does so in all kindness."

In the meantime Van der Vyver had not been idle. Since three o'clock that morning he had been on the move, making arrangements for the funeral. It was six hours' hard driving to fetch the Field Cornet, whose duty it was to hold an inquest.

He had taken the Cornet to view the bodies, and when that was over, hastened to another farm twelve miles away, where the only carpenter in the neighbourhood lived.

Van der Vyver had just returned when the carts arrived with Tante Let and the Brandts, and he had to give as full an account as possible of what had taken place. He was able to tell them that he had sent one of the young Boers from the neighbourhood, who had offered help, with a note to Oom Carel van der Merwe, an elder of the Church, who lived some four hours away, asking him to come over the following morning to conduct the funeral service.

Tante Let expressed her appreciation, and left all the arrangements in the hands of der Vyver. After some consultation it was decided that, as the boys died together, their bodies should be placed in one grave, and at Sterkfontein.

Tante Let gave instructions for the exact spot, after which der Vyver despatched some young men

to all the neighbouring farms to announce the funeral for ten o'clock the next morning, while he himself inspanned the waggon, and took two coffins to the veld to fetch the bodies.

When Brandt and his wife arrived at Boshhoek, they also found a goodly number of friends and neighbours waiting to know whether they could render any assistance at the funeral.

A long and tedious night followed for Tante Let. Sleep was out of the question, and when she occasionally dozed off for a moment, her vivid mind pictured her boy so distinctly that she wakened up to kiss him. Once she thought she saw him come into her room in the old familiar way. So clear was the vision that she involuntarily threw out her arms to clasp him.

Alas ! she was alone.

Sitting up in bed, half-dazed, she began to wonder whether she had not dreamt that he was dead, but soon returning consciousness brought back the irrevocable truth, and she fell back on her pillow with a groan.

So the night dragged on, until at last the eastern sky showed signs of returning day, when, exhausted and overpowered by the severe mental strain, Tante Let fell into a brief, calm sleep.

CHAPTER IX

PURSUIT

IN sparsely-populated districts, where life offers very little excitement, and where conversation is limited to the discussion of domestic affairs, a death is an important event, and becomes a common topic for weeks.

When it became known that two innocent boys had been cruelly murdered, the whole countryside was loud in expressions of sympathy, and unanimous in condemning Bushmen as a pest to be wiped off the face of the earth.

Tante Let being held in very high esteem for her self-sacrificing kindness to others in times of sickness and trouble, it was felt by every one that the blow struck by the Bushmen had descended upon the whole community, and called for immediate and united action. On all sides threats were heard, and the doom of the Bushmen as a tribe was pronounced.

Every one felt it his sacred duty to go to the funeral, not only as a mark of respect to the parents and relatives of the boys, but to offer help and consolation, and to discuss the situation with others, for it was certain that all who could reach Sterkfontein in time would attend, and indeed from early

that morning people were arriving from all directions.

It was impossible for all the people to get into the house, and it was decided to have the funeral in the open. Men were forming themselves into groups all over the homestead, talking earnestly in undertones, until Van der Vyver called them together at the back of the house, where he placed the two coffins on chairs.

Tante Let, Mr. and Mrs. Brandt, and a few of the oldest people, were provided with seats, while the rest stood around with heads uncovered.

Oom Carel van der Merwe, who was a very eloquent speaker, and had conducted such funeral services on many previous occasions, stepped forward to a little table provided for him, and commenced by reading a suitable passage from the Bible. He then gave out the funeral hymn, with which every member of the Dutch Reformed Church is familiar.

Soon the solemn, full tones swelled to the impressive setting. No one who has not heard it sung at a graveside, in the mournful chant in which it is generally rendered, can form any idea of the deep effect it produces in an audience already affected by the solemnity of such an occasion. When the last notes had died away, there was hardly a dry eye in the sympathetic gathering.

Old Oom Carel then began to address the mourners, taking as his text the words: "Fear not, it is I." In a quiet, earnest way he spoke words of comfort to the bereaved, exhorting them to submit humbly to the affliction that had befallen them, and to

remember that their dear ones formed another tie to draw them to their eternal home, where there would be no more sorrowful partings.

When the service was ended, the coffins were taken up, and carried to the grave, followed by a long procession of sorrowing friends and relatives, and with due solemnity consigned to their last resting-place.

On returning to the house Brandt sent word round that he wished to speak a few words to the men, before they left for their homes, and eager to hear what he had to say they all gathered together in front of the stoep.

Mounting his cart which stood in front of the stoep, he surveyed the upturned faces for a few moments. There was not a sign of weakness in the dark commanding eyes that flashed a questioning look on those around. All felt that he had something of great moment to lay before them, as, speaking in a clear voice without a trace of emotion, he began :

“ Men and brothers ! I have asked you to come together, as I wish to speak a few words to you. First, on behalf of Mrs. Uijs, my wife and myself, I tender you our very sincere gratitude for the kindness you have done us in attending the funeral of our beloved children, and for the tokens of condolence and affection you have shown us. It is only when sorrow such as this comes into the home that we learn to appreciate the ever-ready sympathy and fellow-feeling of such sincere friends. At great inconvenience you have left your farms, and gone out of your way to come to our aid.

“ Brothers, I have something more to say to you. From time to time, during the past few years, we have lost numbers of cattle, horses and sheep ; so many, that were they added together the total would exceed the stock of the richest farmer. Especially during the past year have our losses been phenomenal, and never a trace of the lost cattle have we been able to find. We have complained to the Government, but nothing has been done to protect us against these depredations.

“ I need not tell you who the thieves are, for you know yourselves—the Bushmen ! Born thieves and despoilers, they refuse work of any kind, and thrive and batten on the honest sweat of the toiler.

“ Had they stopped at thieving only there might have been some hope of coping with them in time, by meting out to them civil punishment ; but now we see to what length they will go—murder ! ”

As he pronounced the last word, he pointed to the new-made grave, and paused a moment to suppress the wave of emotion that came over him. Then he continued in the same, clear firm voice :

“ The Field-Cornet was sent to view the bodies as is required by law, but there the matter will end, for who can find the murderers ? Who can identify them ? Who can bear testimony against them ?

“ If the matter is left to the slow and cumbersome machinery of the law, the Bushmen will remain at large to claim more stock and more victims. Which of you can consider yourself safe from day to day ? Crouching behind a bush, hiding in an ant-bear hole, or a crevice in the rock, the

enemy shoots you down with his poisoned arrow as you pass unsuspectingly.

"Dare any of you, after what has just taken place, send your children to tend your flocks. Who, then, is master of your farm ?

"The answer is plain. He who has the free choice of your cattle on the plains. He who can murder you with impunity without having to answer for it.

"Brothers, I have made up my mind. It is worse than useless to appeal to the Government. Declaring war on a tribe that is scattered in ones and twos all over the country is out of the question, and the Government would not entertain the idea. I am, therefore, going to be a law unto myself, and I ask you all for your support. I have a death to avenge, and you a death to prevent."

His eyes flashed as he put up his right hand and said solemnly and impressively :

"I swear by the Almighty God that I will follow up and persecute every Bushmen who is not in the employ of a white man, and will shoot him down whenever and wherever I find him. Those of you who will swear likewise hold up your right hands."

Every right hand without exception went up, and the effect of Brandt's speech upon Bushmen as a race is recorded in the one word—extinction.

"It is not the intention," Brandt proceeded, "that we should have any system of warfare, but whenever the presence of Bushmen is detected the owner of the farm is solemnly bound to hunt them out, and any neighbour called upon for assistance is held by his oath to obey the call, for it is only by

united action that we can hope to exterminate the pest.

"Our Government, who are too helpless, or too callous, to protect us in this matter, will naturally disapprove of our action, should they come to hear of it, and if any of us should be accused of having shot a Bushman, white justice will demand a trial on a charge of murder.

"I now, as the mouthpiece of you all who have sworn with me, pronounce a doom over any man, be he black or white, who shall at any time give information to the authorities of any shooting, or evidence at any such trial, whereby a conviction may be secured. Let the Government rave and do their worst. Our grandchildren will thank us for clearing the country of this skulking death.

"To-morrow I proceed to the spot where the boys were murdered, and from there I will follow up the spoor of the murderers. I cannot do this alone. I call for half a dozen volunteers to accompany me."

Many came forward at once, and Brandt had some difficulty in preventing all from joining in the chase. After selecting six young men, he advised the rest of the company to return to their homes, reminding them that their duty was to clear their own areas, and assist their neighbours. He asked all present to spread the news of the resolution so that it might travel to distant Boer homesteads, and in every way extend the feud as far as possible.

As the meeting broke up each man shook Brandt by the hand, tacitly acknowledging him as the leader of the great movement. Sinister satisfaction gleamed in every eye.

Brandt had allowed Van der Vyver to remain for a few days longer at Sterkfontein, ostensibly to assist on the farm, but in reality to keep Tante Let company and prevent her brooding upon her sorrow. Mrs. Van der Vyver was a companionable woman, and tried unceasingly to hearten up the stricken mother.

Tante Let, who knew that Gijs required no help, as he had more than sufficient farm servants, saw Brandt's motive, and felt grateful to her kindly neighbour for his solicitude. Such little thoughtfulnesses lightened the burden of the day, and halved the desolation of the night.

That night, over the supper table, Tante Let asked Gijs to repeat to her what Brandt had said to the mourners at the funeral. She had been indoors at the time, and did not hear the speech.

She listened gravely as her son quoted the arguments advanced for the complete extinction of the Bushmen, and then, after a few moments' silent reflection, said, with considerable feeling: "I admit the force of much of what he said, but my heart is not in the matter."

"But, mother, things cannot go on as they are doing. Not one of us is safe on his own farm."

"You must not forget, Gijs, that we have ever been the aggressors. There is hardly a farm upon which you would not find a couple of young Bushmen, who were torn away from their parents to be brought up as servants."

"The captured youngsters are in much better circumstances than their parents ever dreamt of, and properly clothed, fed and civilized."

"And properly whipped and slaved," chimed in Mrs. Van der Vyver.

"Bondage is bondage, my son," replied Tante Let, "no matter in what walk of life it may be. Freedom is the highest prized possession of the human being."

"I wonder," laughed Mrs. Van der Vyver, "if Gijs were forcibly taken from here—even by our Queen—and compelled to work in a palace, and be dressed and civilized——"

"That is quite a different matter," interrupted Gijs, "you cannot compare our state of feelings and that of a Bushman, for, although we may still be very uncultured, our psychic natures have been developed for ages past, whereas the Bushman is still in the prehistoric state, as far as that is concerned. By civilising and educating their children for them, we are bringing about the first stage of enlightenment, and, a few generations hence, by a natural process of development, the crude and useless material will be converted into serviceable men and women, able to take their share of responsibility in the great march of progress."

"That sounds very pretty," said Tante Let, "and yet you speak of exterminating them as a race."

"As a lawless, thieving race, yes; for you will admit that it is impossible to do anything with the adult Bushman, who has never done a day's work in his life, and never will. He must be done away with, but no one would dream of killing the children. These will be parcelled out to farmers, and taught to work, and obey the laws. There are many

people who do not consider the Bushman a human being at all. He is looked upon by many as an animal, very little above a gorilla in cunning."

"Oh, that is rubbish," interrupted Mrs. Van der Vyver, "the Bushman has fairly established his claim to be classed as a human being."

"In what way?" asked Gijs, amused. "I was just going to add that an apology was due to the gorilla for the comparison."

"There are three infallible tests which distinguish a human being, however low he may be in the scale of life, from an animal. Man makes use of a weapon in killing, while an animal avails itself only of teeth and claws, or such other means of offence, as nature has endowed it with. Man kindles a fire to warm himself against extreme cold, which is beyond the attainment of an animal; and lastly, a dog will attach itself to, and obey a human being, but never another animal. All these characteristics are found in the Bushman, and therefore there can be no doubt that he is human."

"Of course, you must not think," replied Gijs, "that I deny the Bushman his position in the gamut of evolution, though I see but one way out of the difficulty. He is born to idleness; he never on any account tills the soil; never tries to rear or tend stock of any description, so as to make provision against times of scarcity, and consequently he freely helps himself to the fruits of our labour, and, if we inconveniently protest, he lets fly a poisoned arrow to remove us from his path."

Tante Let sighed. "If the white people did not forcibly deprive the Bushmen of their children, I

doubt if any murders would ever have been committed. The vilest animal loves its young, and will protect them with its life. What, then, can be expected from human beings whose parental instincts are violated by superior force? It is as natural for them to retaliate as it would be for us."

"I know, mother, that you are referring to the two babies I brought home some time ago, and I feel that I am the cause of what has befallen us."

"Don't let that trouble you, Gijs," said Tante Let, "for, as you know, this is not the first time that white people have been murdered by Bushmen. The boys very likely interfered with them and they in turn waylaid and killed them."

"I am quite convinced," said Van der Vyver, "that it must have been a sudden attack, and they must have been overpowered before they could defend themselves, as otherwise Piet and Japie would have given a good account of themselves. I have searched in the vicinity to see if I could see any trace of Bushmen, shot or wounded, but could find nothing to satisfy myself. A significant fact was that most of the arrows pierced the boys from the back and sides, showing that they were taken unawares."

"Have you found any spoor?" asked Gijs.

"Quite a dozen, but I had no time to follow them up; besides, I was unarmed, and, as they carried away the guns the boys had, there was not even a gun on the farm."

"It was very risky of you and Jantje both to leave the farm in the middle of the night," said

Tante Let, " what if they had returned and murdered your wife ? "

" There was no time to lose ; besides, I knew they would clear off at once, expecting to be followed, as soon as the deed was discovered," replied Van der Vyver.

Brandt, having set the ball rolling against the Bushmen, seemed determined to carry out his threat to the bitter end. Shortly after sunrise the next morning he arrived at Sterkfontein with his followers. Tante Let, who expected them, had prepared an early breakfast and was ready to receive them. It was agreed that Gijs and Jantje should accompany them, for although Tante Let demurred at Gijs joining such an expedition, she knew that no persuasion would make him stay behind, especially as Wijnand formed one of the party.

" What do you think of this ? " asked Brandt of Tante Let, as soon as they were seated at table. " On my arrival at home yesterday, I received reports that during the time we were at Nachemaal no less than sixty head of cattle disappeared from the neighbourhood. I immediately sent my boys to round up all mine, and found that eight of my best oxen had gone. Have you missed any ? "

" I cannot say," replied Tante Let. " Of course, one would not think of counting cattle at a time like this."

" During your absence I had no time to bring the cattle home," interrupted Van der Vyver, " but I shall do so to-morrow, unless there is other work for me."

" I have no doubt that you will find a number

missing ; and that accounts for the murder of the boys. They were evidently in the way of the thieves and had to be killed, for on none of the other farms was any attempt made to take the lives of the people."

" If I had only caught a whisper of this, I would have rounded up at once, and kept an eye on the cattle," said Van der Vyver.

" It only proves that I was right in what I said yesterday," continued Brandt. " I am not going to work for a den of thieves, but, if I mistake not, there will be very little thieving in this district after to-day."

Tante Let fully intended speaking seriously to Brandt as to the wisdom of promiscuously killing all Bushmen, but on hearing this intelligence, and seeing determination of purpose in his eyes, she realized that it would be useless to speak to him and accordingly held her peace.

" I see you have a native with two spare horses," remarked Gijs to Brandt.

" Yes ; I know your horses are tired, and I have brought them for you and Jantje. I have also brought a gun, so that you can leave yours with Van der Vyver, in case it may be required on the farm during your absence."

" How long do you think of being away ? " asked Tante Let.

" That depends upon when and where we recover our lost cattle, for it would be no good abandoning the pursuit half way, and you may be quite sure that the thieves will be pretty far away by this time. As long as I can trace them by spoor or information,

I shall push on, even if it takes two or three weeks."

"What about provisions for the road?"

"We have a good supply in our saddlebags, and if we run short, we shall have to rely upon game and the assistance of other Boers."

Breakfast was soon over, and the party started off. Van der Vyver went with them as far as the spot where the murder had been committed, in order to point out the spoor he had seen. Here the whole party dismounted and made minute search for signs that might give them a clue. Jantje went back on the spoor of the boys for some distance, and declared that these indicated that the boys were walking leisurely right up to the fatal spot.

He very soon discovered the place where the Bushmen had lain in ambush. There were spoor of about seven or eight, criss-crossing in every direction, but nothing to indicate that any of the men had been wounded by the boys.

Brandt's theory that the boys were overpowered by the sudden and unexpected attack and unable to put up any defence, would seem to be confirmed.

As the footsteps were still clear Jantje was ordered to take the lead, for not only could he extract poisoned arrowheads and cure by his mysterious antidotes the wound made, but his skill as a tracker of man or beast was unrivalled in the district.

Boers are remarkable for their cleverness in reading the great book of nature, and their wisdom in veld lore is great. Each spoor or mark reveals a story, each displaced stone or piece of grass a

tale. And even in the midst of such masters the Hottentot shone out.

In tracking he seemed to be guided by a sort of sixth sense, so superhuman was his keenness of vision, and where no other could discover the slightest indication of a trail he would outline and follow up the spoor unhesitatingly,

Very often, when out after lost cattle, Gijs would stop the quietly excited Jantje as they crossed a difficult stretch of country strewn with stones, and get him to point out the marks by which he was enabled to make his deductions.

This Jantje took a delight in doing, to the instruction of his master, who was fain to marvel at his servant's exceptional powers of observation.

The slightest displacement of a stone, or a broken twig, a tuft of grass disturbed from its natural position, or some leaves or berries shaken from a bush, spoke volumes to one who knew his wild as did the Hottentot.

However slight and varied the indications, and however far apart, Jantje never lost the trail for a moment.

He took considerable pride, too, in giving his master gratuitous lessons in tracking, and illustrating his remarks with practical demonstrations as he went along.

"It is a great mistake, Baas, to walk with your eyes to the ground continuously, for sometimes the ground is silent and there are other tongues which speak—it depends so much upon the animal you are after. Each differs from the other in characteristics and habits. A goat is much more

difficult to follow up than a sheep, just as a horse is easier to locate than an ox, and a man trying to escape is simpler far to track out than one wandering aimlessly about the veld. You see, it is a natural habit of man and cattle to pass down the little ready-made paths twisting among the bushes and the grass. The fugitive, however, makes the mistake of avoiding all beaten down tracks and chooses instead such parts as he thinks would leave no tell-tale footprints behind. Consequently, whatever imprints he does make remain for a considerable period. Had he stuck to the frequented way, the chances are, of course, that his tracks would have merged and confused themselves with others."

Natives, when tracking, always look ahead to try and discover the destination the hunted might have had in view, as they closely observe each patch of ground, and weigh up carefully those that are much stone-strewn. The simplest Hot-tentot makes mental strategical notes of direction, knowing that a stray, wandering beast would never cross a bare stretch of country in preference to the grassy veld which provides good grazing, and that a hunted runaway makes a straight line for cover through any sort of impediment.

Jantje took on the guidance of the party as he was ordered, and as the soft ground held the spoor like a mould, he was able to go forward at a fair pace. After proceeding about a mile the tracker pointed out that the fugitives had come up with another strong party and that they were driving a number of cattle.

No time was lost, except for occasional halts at

places which indicated that more cattle and Bushmen had joined the main body. These tributary streams were carefully examined in order that it might be ascertained from whence the animals came.

A surprising feature of the wholesale theft was that the Bushmen had massed all the cattle into one vast herd, which naturally left a heavy and unmistakable trail. It argued a preconcerted plan of action—an intention of showing fight should they be overtaken.

Towards noon a halt was called. The horses were watered and a hasty meal snatched. The unusual behaviour of the looters supplied food for reflection, and each Boer hazarded an opinion and arrived at no conclusion.

So far the track carefully avoided all homesteads, and held steadily in a northerly direction. Evidently the Bushmen had the intention of crossing the border of the Colony.

"We shall have to push on as fast as possible," said Gijs, "for they have a two days' start of us. Once they cross the Orange River they are safe, and we may as well abandon the chase."

"Abandon the chase!" cried Brandt. "Not if I have to penetrate the heart of the Kalarhari Desert to find them! And if you all leave me I shall return home and make up a special volunteer commando to come with me."

"But, Oom Jan, the difficulty is that we dare not form ourselves into a commando under arms," answered Gijs. "The Government would have something to say to us."

Brandt had finished his meal and was filling his pipe. He lighted it carefully, and puffed out large rings of smoke meditatively.

"When you grow older, Gijs," he said, after a while, "you will understand more about the ways of the Government. Believe me, you have nothing to fear from that quarter, as long as the game you are playing is to their benefit as well as yours. Only be careful that you do not stand alone in any project, for then you will be branded as a law-breaker. But if there is unity and strength, as well as purpose, on your side, then the Government will wink at it. True, some high official will be sent up, and a great fuss made, but after due enquiry and endless correspondence the matter will be allowed to drop, and history will hand your name down to posterity as one of the benefactors of your country.

"Look at the Karroo as it is now. Nothing but a vast barren desert, subject to periodical droughts that sweep away stock by the thousand; infested from one end to the other by bands of roving, lawless, thieving Bushmen, who look upon the white man as an intruder in his country, and therefore his lawful prey.

"Of what value is the Karroo, as habitable land, under present circumstances? Who has to make it habitable? If we carry out our plan of exterminating the Bushmen we shall have done a great deal towards turning this country into a valuable asset for the Colony, for then, at least, one can live in security of life and limb; and ground that the Government is now willing to give away

at a paltry quit-rent will at once acquire greater value, and what is now a wilderness will in time become a thriving and populous part of the Colony.

"No, Gijs, the Government will never go against their own interest, and you and I need not fear hanging for relieving them of the unpleasant duty of clearing the country from thieves, even if our methods are not commended by them."

"I have not looked into the matter in that light, Oom Jan, but what you say sounds true enough," said Gijs. "At any rate, we have set our hands to the plough and cannot look back."

Soon the party were on their way again, following the lead of Jantje, and during the course of the afternoon more spoor was found joining the main body, so that the herd must have numbered at least fifty head.

Towards sunset the trail led the party to a large pool of water between two hills, where grass was plentiful. Here the cattle had been allowed to drink and graze, for the tracks spread out in all directions; and here also a surprise awaited the pursuers, for it was discovered that the cattle had been divided into small lots and driven in various directions—the Bushmen had divided the spoil amongst themselves and each had made off with his booty.

As it was getting late and the spoor could not be followed far before darkness fell, Brandt decided to camp by the pool, and discuss the new development.

CHAPTER X

BARGAINING

WHEN Andries Witte left Tante Let's presence at Victoria West he was in no amiable mood. He felt that for some time past everybody had been giving him a wide berth, and although he was quite able to divine the cause of it, he nevertheless fumed inwardly. He had a very high opinion of himself, and, like all utterly selfish natures, expected every one to pamper him, or at least to treat him with such respect as he considered his due.

Tante Let had practically shown him the door, and for such an act of discourtesy he vowed to find appropriate punishment.

Reviewing the behaviour of all his former friends, he came to the conclusion that the hand of each one was against him, and that he was the Ishmael of the whole community. When visiting town he invariably occupied a little room in Tukie's yard, that by agreement was always kept for ready him.

After leaving Tante Let, he went straight to this room, and threw himself into an armchair. He lay looking at the ceiling for fully a quarter of an hour, with an ugly expression on his face, and completely lost in thought. Then, suddenly, he sat upright, and began talking to himself :

“Very well! If everybody is turning against me, let it be so. In future there will be only one person whom I will consider, and that is myself. I wonder what I have done to deserve such treatment, for nothing was ever brought home to me. I have been more successful than others in speculation, and in business matters each has to look after his own interests. If people are fools enough to lose their money, I fail to see how any blame can attach to me.

“And to be shown the door by an old cat like Tante Let! Very well, very well, indeed, Mrs. Uijs! You will receive special attention. I did not want your miserable farm as a gift, and meant to do you nothing but good. However, you have completed my education, and it remains to be seen whether I can or cannot do without your courtesy. I shall turn my back upon you all, and take pride in acting my assumed character of Ishmael to the very letter.”

He glanced at his watch. “In an hour’s time,” he said, “he ought to be here, and then we can proceed to business. My new scheme is ready, and I am anxious to carry it out.”

It is the hallmark of selfish, egotistical minds that if a few deny them the homage they claim, the whole world seems antagonistic to them, whereas the flatteries of a few insincere acquaintances will raise them to their self-erected pedestal of vainglory.

Witte was one of those characters whose whole consciousness of existence consisted in pampering every wish. Imbued with the conviction that the world was, or should be, at his feet, he spared no

pains in claiming his position by lording over all and sundry who were endowed with sufficient sense to recognise his superiority and to submit to his sovereignty.

Possessed with an insatiate desire for wealth, his one great object in life was to amass enough money to satisfy his cravings, and to arrive at this goal he synonymised the word "thine" with "mine," exculpating himself on the jesuitical principle that the end justified the means.

A knock at his door called him from his meditations, and a moment later he was closeted with the new-comer.

"I am glad you are punctual, for I have not got much time to lose," said Witte with a lofty air, as though to impress the other with his indifference to the business on hand.

"No time need be lost, Andries, but as I came here at your bidding, perhaps you will explain matters," was the reply.

"At my bidding? Didn't you write me first?"

"Certainly, but perhaps you forget that you wrote back, saying an interview was preferable to correspondence."

Both tried to appear indifferent, in order to drive as keen a bargain as possible, but each knew the other well, and words were not wasted.

"Well, then, let us proceed to business," said Witte. "What do you require?"

"I will take as many head of cattle as you can sell me at my price," was the rejoinder.

"What is your price?"

"Twenty ryksdaalders, to take them as they come, great and small, exclusive of calves."

"Ridiculous! No man can sell a beast for that," snorted Witte with contempt.

"Andries Witte can." These words were accompanied by a look so significant, that Witte inwardly winced, for they amounted to a direct command.

"I am always open to business," he replied, "but there is a limit beyond which a demand may become unreasonable, and to expect any man to supply cattle at twenty ryksdaalders is driving the bargain too hard."

From his tone it was clear that he was addressing one who had some power over him, and whom he dared not oppose to any degree, as otherwise he would have spurned the idea of selling cattle at the ridiculous figure mentioned.¹

"I am not even trying to drive a bargain," the other replied. "I have to take all the risk, while you remain the innocent partner, no matter what may happen. That at least is our agreement, to which I am quite willing to stick, but it will not be quite in accordance with the truth if I were to say that I do so out of pure love for you. No, Andries, we either drop the business at once, or else it must be made worth my while. We have pulled off many a little scheme between us, to our mutual benefit, but never anything quite so hazardous as what you have proposed, and as the greater danger will fall

¹ The old Dutch ryksdaalder was equal to eighteenpence in English money, and was for many years the standard of reckoning; so much so that the term "dollar" has survived in the Colony to this day to designate the sum of eighteenpence.

to my share, I must have the greater share in the profit."

"I cannot admit that my risk is less than yours," persisted Witte. "If anything is traced to me I shall be lost."

"And what in my case? Let me remind you of the condition you made, that when once the cattle are handed over to me, all trace of you must vanish from the transaction as completely as though you never existed. Well, if anything is ever traced to me, I must be ready with papers and witnesses to establish my innocence, and all that means money. But, I again repeat,—let the matter drop!"

"I never drop a scheme when once I have made up my mind to it, as you know, and, as I have a special motive in seeing this through, I accept your price,—though it is a mere pittance."

"How many can you deliver?"

"A hundred."

"When?"

"On Sunday."

"Where?"

"At the place agreed upon."

"No, I will only accept delivery on the other side of the Orange River, and, as agreed, the money will be handed over as soon as I have counted the cattle. The river is low now and can easily be forded."

"It is well," replied Witte after a moment's thinking. "You know to whom to hand the money."

"I do," replied the other, rising. "And as there is nothing more to be said, it is best that we part, and not be seen together. Good-bye."

“ Good-bye.”

As he came, he left. Witte never once mentioned him by name. Plainly he was a confederate of long standing, and held many of Witte's secrets in his keeping, and thus had power to dictate terms.

He was a plain, shabbily-dressed man of medium height, grey eyes, high bridged nose, with a dark, short-cropped beard. His large sensual mouth and firm chin at once marked him as a man who would not brook trifles, while his keen, penetrating, grey eyes spoke of a power that subdued minds, less positive, to his will. His was the personality of a man it were better to call friend than foe—one who would scorn personal inconvenience and endure hardships to attain an end, and from whom none need expect mercy or consideration, where it did not suit some purpose in giving.

As soon as he had gone, Witte rose and went into Tukie's store to complete his purchases. These consisted of a large quantity of tobacco, cheap pipes, flints and clasp knives. After he had paid for these he called Tukie aside and whispered something into his ear.

“ Rather ! What you think ? As much as you want, Mr. Witte,” replied Tukie. “ Shall I put it into a demijohn or a small barrel ? ”

“ Something that will not break,” was the curt rejoinder.

Tukie disappeared from the scene for a few moments, but soon returned again to tempt the customer into making further purchases.

“ You will find it on your cart, Mr. Witte, all safe and sound, wrapped up in a bag. No one will

know what it is. What you think ? ” and he winked knowingly as he rubbed his hands.

“ What more can I sell you ? Look around, Mr. Witte, look round. Always something that you may have forgotten in the hurry. What you think ? ”

“ I only want my account now, Tukie, and to get away.”

In less than ten minutes he was on his way to his farm, driving his horses at full speed, as though he had some urgent business on hand that required immediate attention, and in less than two hours he reached home.

Rietkuil was a beautiful farm. The homestead was well planted with trees, prominent amongst which a number of blue-gums towered well above the others. Of fruit trees there was a good variety, but, as is usual in high altitudes, the late frost nipped all fruit in the bud, and only in exceptional seasons did a good crop come to perfection ; but when that lucky event did take place, the Karroo fruit was unrivalled in the whole Colony for delicacy of flavour and quality.

The dwelling-house stood on a little elevation overlooking the garden, and was built in the old Dutch style—massive walls, whitewashed ; small windows and the inevitable double door, divided horizontally.

The principal charm of Rietkuil was its magnificent water supply, which consisted of a strong fountain bubbling out of a kloof in a mountain, about half a mile beyond the homestead. The stream, being too much for the requirements of the farm, was allowed to flow down past the homestead into

the valleys below, where it formed deep pools covered with reeds and rushes that formed a striking contrast to the barrenness of the surrounding veld and kopjies.

Witte, however, had no penchant for manual labour, and would not expend what was necessary to cultivate the farm to its full extent.

The process of becoming rich by annual harvests was far too slow, and demanded too much trouble and outlay. He therefore got a family of poor whites to live with him, in a spare building some distance removed from the homestead, to work and cultivate the lands and gardens on half profits. This family he provided with meat and the necessities of life, and managed in such a way that, when the grain was garnered, the family was so deeply in debt for supplies that he claimed the whole harvest in order to square off accounts.

As soon as he reached the homestead, two young native boys were ready to take charge of the cart and horses and relieve their master.

"Jan," said Witte, addressing one of them, "when you have outspanned the horses, go and tell Oukop I want to see him. He must come at once."

Oukop was a Hottentot, of the same age as Witte. They had grown up together from childhood. Wherever Witte went he took Oukop with him, and the latter had such a deep-rooted love for his master that nothing could induce him ever to leave his service.

Those who knew of the close understanding between the two generally referred to Oukop as Witte's first lieutenant, and, indeed, Witte never entered

into any scheme but what Oukop played some part in it, for to his master he was the embodiment of honour and faithfulness, and in return he had more influence over Witte than any other person living.

When Oukop came to the house, Witte beckoned him into his private room, known as the office, where he could speak without being overheard or disturbed.

After closing the door carefully, he seated himself at a table with some writing material upon it, while Oukop squatted on the floor at the side of the table.

"How many men have you in readiness?" Witte asked.

"Fifteen, Baas; but I can get more if required."

"That I leave entirely to you, for I have quite altered my plans."

He fumbled about with the papers on the table, and pretended to make some notes. In reality he was debating with himself whether to tell Oukop the whole truth, or only part of it. After a while he turned round in his chair and said:—

"Listen carefully to what I am going to say, for I depend upon you to see the matter through, and there must be no hitch in the arrangements. I have long since felt, but I am quite convinced now, that everybody has turned against me, for some reason I cannot understand; and some have gone so far as to snub and insult me."

"Insult *you*, Baas? What for?"

"Without any cause or reason at all, as far as I can see." Witte frowned, and showed his annoyance, but Oukop openly smiled in his master's face.

"What are you laughing at, you fool?" Witte asked in surprise.

"I can't help thinking how sorry they will soon be, for no one has ever insulted you and escaped punishment! I am ready to listen to your plans, Baas."

"To begin with, I have sold a hundred head of cattle."

It was Oukop's turn to be surprised, and he whistled softly. "It will take some time and trouble to buy them up, as prices are high now."

"I have already bought and paid good prices for cattle, but this time I want them at my own figure."

"Where are they to be had, Baas, for less than the usual price?"

"The white people, I know, won't sell below certain prices, but I have an idea that cattle can be got from Bushmen at very low prices."

Oukop started, as his master's meaning flashed across his mind.

"Yes, I see, this is part of the punishment you have thought out, but let me warn you, Baas, it is very dangerous."

"Where is the danger? I buy the cattle that are offered me by Bushmen, and I ask no further questions. Besides yourself, who is ever to know that I am connected with the transaction?"

Oukop understood perfectly, and remained quiet for a time, seriously pondering the proposal.

"Had it not been that you have planned this as a punishment, I would have nothing to do with it; but to please you, I will see what can be done," he said at length.

"On Sunday night the cattle must be delivered across the Orange River, at the spot where we usually ford it."

"To whom?"

"To you. Don't accept delivery of a hoof until they are over the river, then you hand them to the same man to whom you delivered the horses three months ago, and he will hand you the money in exchange. Count the cattle you hand over, and see that you receive twenty ryksdaalders per head."

"What am I to pay?"

"You barter them for tobacco, brandy, and clasp knives. I have brought a sufficient supply."

For fully an hour more the interview lasted, during which time all the details were discussed, so that Oukop knew exactly what to do, and where to go. He knew several Bushman caves in the surrounding hills, and could speak their language, with its peculiar clicks, fluently.

It was his habit when seeking parley with them to place some food and tobacco in one of their caves, as a token that he wanted an interview, and although as a rule they fought shy of other races, they came to know him as a friend, or at least as one who would not do them an injury, unless they gave provocation.

Immediately after the interview with his master, he proceeded in the direction of one of these caves, carrying a supply of meat and tobacco with him, and it was dusk before he again returned.

Witte saw him coming, and so impatient was he to hear what had happened, that he sauntered on to meet Oukop some distance from the homestead.

"It is all right, Baas, they are quite game, and will start early in the night, but they want food for the road. I have arranged to send over two sheep to-night to be divided amongst them, and have promised to provide meat at certain stages, until they reach the Orange River. It is absolutely necessary, otherwise they will kill an ox and so be delayed."

"Do they know the route well enough?" Witte asked anxiously.

"Oh, yes, some of them know the identical spot where the cattle have to ford the river. They can, however, form no idea of what a hundred means, and we shall simply have to take what they bring. I have pointed out to them a certain mountain, where the cattle must be on the third night. There I shall await them with food, count the cattle and direct them further."

"Could they reach the river on Sunday night?"

"Easily, Baas, for they will drive night and day, with only short intervals for grazing."

"Very well, see that they get what food they require, and start them at once. I do not want any delay in the matter, but above all, be very careful that you do not in any way compromise either me or yourself."

Having thus cautioned Oukop, Witte went back into his office to think matters over finally. He was accustomed to act the sharper in all transactions, and always found consolation in the thought that all was fair in love and war. All business matters to him were on a par with warfare, where each one had to protect himself as well as he could.

He had however never yet gone so far as to commit actual theft, and do what he liked, the idea of his present undertaking caused him a great deal of anxiety—not that he had any qualms of conscience, but he dreaded the possibility of detection.

Bushmen he knew to be treacherous in the extreme, and if any of them were caught in the act, he knew they would at once round upon Oukop, who had employed them as tools. He knew that he could trust Oukop through thick and thin, but when once the crime was traced to his farm, he would have to abandon Oukop to justice, so as not to compromise himself in any way, and when Oukop found himself deserted in the hour of trouble, he might blurt out the whole truth.

To defend or protect Oukop under such circumstances would be tantamount to implicating himself. He therefore set himself the task of counter-plotting for proofs of innocence, in case necessity should arise for them.

He sat thinking for a long time, smoking one pipe after another, until at last he seemed to have made up his mind, for, on going out of the house, he put his fingers in his mouth, and gave a shrill whistle. He went back again, and had hardly seated himself before Oukop appeared in the doorway.

“Come in, and close the door after you.”

Oukop did as he was told, and again squatted on the floor, as was his habit when inside the house.

“When are you going to take the food away?” asked Witte.

“As soon as all are asleep,” was the cautious reply.

“ How ? ”

“ I shall kill two sheep, tie them on horses, and lead the horses.”

“ No, that will never do. I have thought the matter out carefully, so as to avoid any further trouble.”

“ Baas, I have also thought the matter over, and I do not like the business at all. Bushmen are never to be trusted, and I have a feeling that we shall be sorry for this. Can't you think of another way of punishing those people who insulted you, so that we need not confide our plans to others ? ”

Oukop looked his master straight in the face, so that for a moment Witte began to waver ; but he soon recovered himself, and said :

“ I have set my heart upon this, and will not turn back ; besides, I have given my word that the cattle shall be delivered on Sunday night. If you will only carefully follow out my instructions, there will be nothing to fear.”

“ As you please, Baas ; but I am afraid.”

“ Now, listen carefully. Go to the Bushmen and tell them to come and take two sheep from the kraal, also drive a young ox up to the fountain, and let them take it with them. They must on no account kill this ox, but put it with the others that they are taking across the Orange River. On the second day after they have gone, you come and report the loss to me. I shall give you a gun, and put you on a horse, with instructions to follow up the thieves wherever they may be. This will account for your absence, and give the lie to any that may turn against us, and will also allow you the time

required to be at the appointed spot on the third night."

"They are sure to be followed up, Baas, for it is impossible to hide the spoor of a troop of cattle; and when caught they will tell the whole story. If we deny it, and they get into trouble, we shall be daily pestered by the whole tribe, and our lives would not be safe for one hour."

Oukop spoke seriously, hoping to dissuade his master from a course that he felt would lead to disaster.

"They must not be caught, and if they take the cattle from the farms I mentioned, I do not see how they can be overtaken, for it will take from two to three days before the owners will be back from town, and it may take another day or two before they discover their loss, so that there will be a clear start of four days at least. If they are quick about it, there will not be the least risk whatever."

"I will do as you wish, Baas, but let me again warn you that the success and safety of the undertaking rest entirely upon the secrecy of the Bushmen, and you know what that means! Even if they succeed without a hitch, who is to keep them quiet? At any time they may steal something from this farm, and you will be powerless to punish them; if you do so, they will not think twice about taking revenge by telling the whole country what they know. Baas, you are putting yourself in the power of traitors."

Oukop spoke earnestly, and Witte felt the force of the argument, for he knew the treacherous nature of the Bushman. But he also thought of the money

to be so easily got, and his revenge upon his fellow Boers for insulting him, and he waved Oukop away, determined that the matter should go through.

For a long time after Oukop had left him, Witte sat thinking and smoking. Already he felt ill at ease, and the warning of his faithful servant kept ringing in his ears.

To give in to fears was childish and weak ; besides, he could not think of any other way of wreaking his vengeance. Still, he had no wish to be caught like a rat in a trap. He quite agreed with Oukop that it was foolish to put himself in the power of Bushmen, and yet they were ready and willing tools. He consoled himself with the fact that Bushmen were known to be notorious liars, and most likely no one would believe them if they turned upon him ; especially if he proved, as he could, that they had also stolen an ox from him on the same occasion, and that he had made diligent search for it. If, however, matters took a different turn from what he had planned, he would think out some method of removing them entirely from his path.

Sorely against his will, Oukop carried out his master's instructions, taking particular care that none of the farm servants should have the slightest suspicion of what was going on.

He exhorted the Bushmen to be very careful, and avoid meeting with any human being, if possible. He had carefully explained to them the route, impressing upon them which parts to travel over by day and which by night, so as to minimize the danger of detection before reaching the river. He had supplied them with food and tobacco, and prom-

ised them clasp knives and a plentiful supply of brandy, if they carried out their mission without a hitch.

Brandy always was, and ever will be, the curse of the lesser developed native races, who are always ready to sell body and soul for an hour's drunkenness, and there is no length to which they will not go, or depths of degradation to which they will not descend, in order to satisfy their inordinate craving for stimulant.

Little wonder, then, that they were ready at the risk of life and limb to raid several farms for cattle in order to secure the riotous carousal which the near future promised, when brandy would be forthcoming from the white man's cellar, which appeared to be at all times inexhaustible.

Two days later, as arranged, Oukop counted the live stock on the farm, and announced that two sheep and a young ox were missing.

Witte immediately ordered the men to make careful search for the missing animals, and to find them wherever they might be, threatening to deduct the loss from their wages.

This threat they knew from past experience to be no idle talk; consequently they searched every nook and corner of the farm, until at last they came upon the place where the sheep had been slaughtered by the Bushmen.

Tired out and footsore, they returned to the homestead towards evening to report their discovery.

Witte raved in an exaggerated manner against Bushmen as a tribe, and swore that he would leave

no stone unturned until he had purged his farm and the neighbourhood from every vestige of the race.

Oukop was ordered to arm himself and leave early the next morning on horseback to trace the thieves, and not to return until he had captured them, or at least discovered their whereabouts, so as to enable Witte to collect some neighbours and hunt them out.

The play was kept up until Oukop had left, and then Witte gave strict instructions to all his servants that any sign of the presence of Bushmen on his farm should forthwith be reported to him, and as a further precaution he ordered his horse to be saddled, so that he could go to his nearest neighbours and warn them of the presence of a den of thieves in their midst, and thus put them on their guard.

So far all promised well, and Witte knew that he could place absolute reliance on Oukop, whose native shrewdness would overcome all difficulties that might arise from the Bushmen.

If all went well, Oukop would be back on the night of the following Tuesday, and his master waited with what patience he could for the time to pass.

CHAPTER XI

NEMESIS

JUST before daybreak the following morning Brandt and his party—whose beds consisted of hollows scooped out in the sand, with saddles or saddlebags as pillows—got up, and whilst the natives kindled a fire to prepare the morning coffee—for the Boer never travels without a kettle and a good supply of ground coffee—the men went to the water to wash.

As soon as it was light enough to see, Jantje was ordered to walk round the spot to find out into how many parties the thieves had split themselves, so that something definite could be decided upon before making a start.

“ I have grown up here,” said Brandt, “ but never before have known Bushmen band together like this.”

“ And not only that, Oom Jan,” said Gijs, “ but have you ever heard of Bushmen dividing the spoil amongst themselves and travelling so far before killing a beast and gorging themselves ? ”

“ There is something new about their tactics, and unless a decided stop is put to it, the country will soon be denuded of cattle,” replied Brandt.

“ I am not surprised at it,” said Wijmand. “ I

think fear drives them on like this. They have committed murder, and know that they will be followed."

"In that case they would have taken to the mountains sooner. I am sorry that they have split up, for it will take us very much longer to hunt them all out. We shall have to call in the assistance of the Boers round about here."

Coffee was soon ready and served out with a biscuit and a chunk of biltong. The discussion was kept up during breakfast until Jantje returned from his inspection of the spoor.

He went straight up to Brandt, and reported that the cattle had been divided into eight parts which were driven in different directions. And he gave particulars of each group and the number of drivers.

"Baas," he continued, "there is something suspicious, for I see that they have been met here by a man on horseback."

"How can you tell? It might be that a man passed here on horseback after they had gone on," suggested Gijs.

"No, Baas, I am sure. Here at the water the spoor of the horse shows over those of the cattle, but a little further on the spoor of the cattle shows over those of the horse. He must, therefore, have left here before the cattle."

"But how do you know that there was a man on the horse? It might have been a stray horse."

"Any one can see that, Baas," replied Jantje, moving off to join the other natives.

"Now, the question is whether this rider had anything to do with the matter at all," said Brandt.

“ He may have been a casual passer-by, or he may have been searching for lost cattle too, and came to see whether his were amongst those he saw at the water. We shall find that out later.”

The horses were soon saddled again and the party in readiness to proceed.

Brandt divided the men into three groups, and ordered them to follow the three sections of spoor that were nearest to each other, so that the party could remain in touch as much as possible. He gave instructions to push on as fast as they could, and not to rest except to water the horses at noon.

Each group took up the spoor indicated, and started off at a fast canter. They were soon divided by kopjes and hills and beyond hailing distance, as the spoor led them apart.

The pursuers had, however, made up their minds to see the matter through, and determined to cover a good distance during the day, if the thieves were not overtaken sooner.

The horses were not spared, and early in the afternoon began to show signs of fatigue. Still, as the Orange River could be reached before dark, they were encouraged to keep up the chase, as it was just possible that the stolen cattle would be given a rest there.

About an hour before sunset the groups of pursuers suddenly came within sight of each other, and seemed to be making for the same point ahead.

Brandt, thinking that the others had abandoned or lost their trail, and returned, lost his temper, and shouted out his disapproval before they came up to him. But soon another surprise met him, as it

became apparent that the spoor all came together again, and that the cattle were once more driven in a body.

Jantje, who was some distance ahead, noticed it first, and after proceeding a few paces further, suddenly stood still, and beckoned to the others.

When they came up with him, he pointed to the ground, and there again were the footprints of a horse, and to all appearance the same spoor they had seen that morning.

It now became abundantly clear that the Bushmen were acting under the command of the mysterious individual on horseback. A hurried consultation took place, during which Brandt decided to send Gijs and Wijnand to the crest of a fairly high kopje from where the river could be seen in the distance, to see if any sign of the cattle was to be discovered; and told them to wave their hats should they spy them anywhere.

Eagerly the two scaled the kopje, and within a few minutes were peering from the top in every direction. They could see no trace of cattle anywhere, although the river was plainly in sight some half an hour's ride further on.

Failing to discern anything in the distance they walked over the top of the kopje and disappeared from view, but within a few minutes reappeared, running and waving their hats; nor did they stop until they met the others who hurried forward to meet them.

"They are right behind the kopje," exclaimed Gijs, panting. "We could not see anything in the distance, and walked over to look below us, when we

almost fell right upon them. The man on horseback was just riding off in the direction of the river."

"Did they see you?" asked Brandt.

"No, the moment we caught sight of them we hid behind boulders and retreated."

"They are evidently giving the cattle a rest before fording the river, and the rider has gone off first to find a suitable spot," remarked Brandt. "We can easily recapture the cattle and shoot the Bushmen; but above all I should like to get at the rider, as he is far worse than the Bushmen. Could you see what he was like?"

"His face was turned from us, but, judging from his clothes and his manner of riding, I should say he was a Hottentot," replied Wijnand.

"What is the kopje like on the other side?"

"Very rocky, and there is a kloof running down it covered with thick bush, in which the thieves are hiding with their booty; but from the foot of the kopje is a clear stretch of grass veld right up to the banks of the river, which is again covered with thick mimosa," answered Wijnand.

"Then it will, perhaps, be best to surround the kopje at once, and despatch them before they reach the mimosa," suggested Gijs. "Wijnand and I can go to the top and waylay them while the others charge from the bottom."

"And in the end we shall have more casualties than they. You have still to learn the ways of the Bushman, my boy. The bush, the rock and the crevice are his elements, and it is no child's play to dislodge him from these. You may find yourself

riddled with poisoned arrows before you even so much as catch a glimpse of him. My object is not to fight the Bushmen, but simply to exterminate them as vermin, and we have to consider the best ways and means of doing that.

“We shall stop under cover where we are, and rest our horses, until they leave the kopje with the cattle, and, as soon as they are too far away to retreat, we shall charge from behind and overtake them, before they reach the river bank ; for in the open veld Bushmen are helpless, as their arrows cannot carry so far as the bullet.”

“Baas,” interrupted Jantje, “we must not give them too great a start, for some of them run as fast as a horse, and if they see us in time they will abandon the cattle and take to their heels, and, as our horses are tired out already, they will escape.”

“All right, Jantje. You had better go to the top of the hill now and watch their movements, so that you can give the sign when to start.

“No, Baas. It is no good going to the top again, as one of them might be going there, too, to see if the land is clear. I will slink round the base, and keep well out of sight.”

“What you say is good,” replied Brandt, well pleased, “and we shall in the meantime go to that patch of mimosa at the side of the hill to get better cover, in case they should send a rear spy.”

Jantje set off at once on his errand, while Brandt and his party prepared themselves for the coming slaughter, taking shelter as agreed.

The sun was sinking low, and Jantje still remained away, which caused Brandt to become very impa-

tient, for under cover of darkness a Bushman is the worst possible foe to meet. Even in broad daylight he is a difficult quarry, for given the least shelter—even a little bush,—he will not show the white feather, but lie in wait until his enemy is within easy range of his deadly arrow, and then he will fight to the death.

Brandt, therefore, ordered his men to follow him at a walking pace, in the direction Jantje had gone, determined, if necessary, to storm the kloof while light lasted, sooner than allow the Bushmen to escape during the night.

Fortune, however, favoured him, for just as he was rounding the base of the hill, Jantje returned at a gallop to call the men together.

Brandt hurriedly gave orders, and warned his men to remain out of reach of the arrows, if possible, whilst Jantje received a command to hold himself in readiness to extract any arrow that might find its mark.

No further time was lost, and the men dashed round the kopje in pursuit. The Bushmen were about half a mile away and driving the cattle at a slow pace. The distance they had travelled gave them a feeling of security—nobody looked round, and Brandt was able to get quite close to them before he was observed.

It was an open grassy plain, without shelter of any description, and as soon as the alarm was raised, the Bushmen dashed in among the cattle, with the idea of protecting themselves behind them.

For the moment Brandt and his men were non-plussed by what certainly was a clever move, as,

although arrows could be shot at them, they could not fire in return without fear of killing and maiming the cattle.

The problem was to separate the Bushmen from the cattle before night fell. At most there would be half an hour's daylight in which to do what was necessary, and if they failed to effect their purpose before dark, the raiders would undoubtedly make good their escape.

The cattle, tired out by their long march, and confused by the strange conduct of their drivers, stood stock still, unconsciously providing the required cover.

Brandt called a halt to consider what was best to do in this new and unexpected development.

"There is only one way," said Gijs. "We have to charge right into them and scatter the cattle. I have often heard that Bushmen are bad shots at fast moving objects."

"That is true," answered Brandt, "but a man on horseback is a large mark and can hardly be missed. And we must not forget that good horses are more precious than cattle. Besides, I do not wish to risk any lives."

"Here's a suggestion that may be useful," put in one of the young Boers. "In shooting at a springbok lately as it ran in and out amongst a herd of cattle, I accidentally hit a bullock in his hind quarter, and he immediately started jumping about and bellowing with pain. As soon as the rest of the band scented the blood they began to bellow too, and run after their wounded comrade. Perhaps if we were to wound one of these young oxen he might be the

means of setting the herd in motion, and enable us to effect our purpose before dark."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Brandt. "Shoot one." Approaching to a safe distance, the suggestor of this brilliant counter-move dismounted and fired at a bullock, hitting him sideways in the buttocks.

The effect was electrical. The animal bellowed and circled through the herd as if possessed with an evil spirit, disturbing the equanimity and dignity of even the sedate and mild-eyed cows by his sudden and inexplicable behaviour.

Soon some of the younger animals began to get excited and ran after the injured beast with their tails high in the air; while the older ones, stirred by the unexpected commotion, and getting the smell of blood in their nostrils, bellowed angrily, and dashed hither and thither aimlessly as though trying to discover the nature of the disturbance.

As the cattle began to disperse a Bushmen here and there became isolated and immediately several shots rang out. The herd, already disturbed, took fright, and broke loose in all directions.

The horsemen soon surrounded the Bushmen, who crouched flat on the ground, vainly endeavouring to reach the enemy with their arrows.

The great odds in favour of the bullet soon began to tell, and ere dark there was not one Bushman left to warn his tribe of the fate in store for them. Fourteen corpses of men, women, and children were dragged to a little sloop some distance off and covered with grass.

Before the last few were shot, Brandt ordered

Jantje, who could make himself understood, to shout out that, if the survivors would throw down their arrows and say who the rider was, he would spare their lives. The only reply was a few arrows whizzing close past Jantje's head, and although the offer was repeated three times, no other answer could be obtained. A few minutes later the little company were numbered with the dead.

"This undoubtedly is the saddest bit of work I have ever done on a Sunday," remarked Brandt, "but I have no misgivings about it, for amongst these men are the murderers of those two innocent children. I cannot go back on my oath to exterminate the Bushmen, even though I have satisfied my own personal vengeance. It may seem harsh and cruel, but the safety and prosperity of my countrymen demand it. Better that it be done at once than to leave it to the future, when, after a long string of murders and heartbreakings, our children, who will find that it is impossible for an industrious civilised race to live together with an indolent thieving tribe that exists like parasites on the sweat of others, will be compelled to take up the task."

The men now gathered the cattle together, and returned to the kloof. It was a calm night, and the party would gladly have started on the return journey had the horses been fresh. As things were it was decided to bivouac and march early next morning.

The wounded bullock had ceased his antics and stood apart from the herd. It was evident that he would not be able to travel for many days to come, as the wound was deep and crippling.

Brandt, therefore, ordered him to be shot, and as much meat to be carried as was required for provisions along the road.

The animal proved to be one of Tante Let's, so Gijs himself gave the *coup-de-grace*. Very soon the meat was cut up, and placed on some bushes to dry.

A large fire was made, and as the meat supply was practically unlimited, each man roasted as much as he could eat. The native servants, cheered by the prospect of a flesh feast, chatted gaily among themselves, recounting the events of the last hour over and over again. The white men alone were quiet and thoughtful.

Brandt spoke very little, and then merely to refer to the mysterious rider who had escaped retribution.

He knew it would be futile to attempt to follow the spoor across the river, though he would gladly have spent days in the attempt had he thought there would be the slightest chance of discovering the identity of the horseman.

Gijs and Wijnand spoke only when addressed, and made the merest attempt at eating. It was their first experience of shedding human blood, and although the victims were Bushmen and murderers, the deed went against the grain.

Some of the other men, less interested, and thoroughly tired out with the day's exertions, ate voraciously large pieces of grilled meat before seeking out a comfortable spot on the bare ground on which to sleep.

When Brandt and his party returned, the news

of the first "kill" spread from farm to farm, from district to district, until it became common knowledge among the Bushmen as well. Had the latter taken warning, and conquered their thieving propensities, had they offered their services to the Boers, who would not only have paid and fed them in return but have civilized them into useful and respectable citizens, the issue of the feud would have been vastly different.

The old-time Boer was very strict with his servants and often beat them mercilessly for petty crimes. On the other hand, when his commands were met with obedience and respect, he undoubtedly made the most considerate and generous of masters. Strictly orthodox in religion, he conducted household prayers every night before retiring, and every servant, from the oldest to the youngest, was expected to be present.

The head of the family would take up his position at the table with the Bible, whilst the wife and children sat around, holding their hymn books. When all was ready the Baas shouted to the kitchen, and immediately the servants filed in, and squatted down respectfully on the floor. The lesson was read and explained, a hymn sung and a prayer offered, after which the children and servants were questioned on the lesson in order that the interlocutor might find out whether proper attention had been given to the solemn matter in hand.

Bushman, however, had no mind for civilization of this kind. Bred, for generations, to indolence, he resented all attempts to make him work and learn, and deeply resented the intrusion of the white

man into a country wherein the natives were accustomed to roam and shoot and dig for roots in perfect freedom. When he realised that he was expected to work or extinguish himself, the Bushman, as a natural result, turned his hand against his so-called oppressor in a mad attempt to free himself from what he considered an interfering and tyrannical domination.

Many were the murders committed, many the homesteads entered in the dead of night, many the children waylaid and killed in broad daylight on the farms. Outrages that hastened the end, for at last the only evidence of the existence of the savage wanderers was the crude, indelible drawings to be seen on the rocks and in the caves.

Whatever may be said of the pioneer Karroo farmer, the fact remains that he converted a large tract of country, a barren desert infested by roving bands of Bushmen, and overrun by fierce beasts of prey, into a habitable and revenue-producing part of the Colony.

The struggle was an arduous one, lasting over many generations, and retarded the Boer in his forward march in the van of progress and education. But dormant within him lay the splendid traits of his forefathers across the sea, and when at last his battle with beasts, Bushmen, and barren deserts was won, he turned his attention to the higher aspects of life, and won a place for himself there also.

CHAPTER XII

GIJS PROPOSES

ABOUT three months after the tragic event at Sterkfontein, things began to quieten down and assume their usual peaceful aspect. To the surprise of all, Tante Let appeared cheerful and interested in the welfare of her neighbours. For days at a time she was away from home watching over a sick bed at some distant farm, like an angel of mercy bringing solace and peace. Often she would return to find a cart waiting for her, and an urgent message to come to the assistance of some other family stricken down by illness.

However worn out and in need of rest she might be, to refuse would have given Tante Let more pain than a whole week's tiring vigil at a sick bed. Her life was spent in loving sacrifices for others, and often when remonstrated with by friends, she would say that it helped her to forget her own sorrows and longing for her dear ones.

One evening after worship, as Gijs was sitting in his accustomed seat opposite her, she went up to him and tenderly stroking his head, said :

“ Gijs, you are old enough to get married now, and it is my dearest wish that you should have

a good, cheerful companion. Besides, I am so very lonely in the house when you are out. I long for children about me, and it would be a comfort in my old age to be surrounded by your little ones, who would in course of time be the natural heirs of what your father and you yourself have worked and struggled for."

Gijs smiled up at her.

"Lately the old home has been so neglected for the sake of others, that either I shall have to get married, or ask you seriously not to go out so often as you have done of late!"

"Don't be selfish, Gijs. Remember, in our days of trouble friends came from far and near to offer help, and spared no trouble to do for us what lay in their power."

"It is not selfishness, mother. I am concerned for your health. You are all I have."

"You must get another interest."

"Easier said than done," replied Gijs, with a sigh.

"You surprise me! Have you not made an attempt?"

"No, mother," said the young man, simply.

"Then don't look for obstacles. You know the saying, 'Faint heart never won fair lady'?"

"It is not that—although I am uncomfortably shy in the presence of women. The fact is, I am not alone in the field."

Tante Let smiled. She knew him and every trait in his character. He was his father over again. Her mind went back to the past and the day when her Gijs, tongue-tied and faltering,

declared his love in a manner that caused her nearly to laugh in his face, even whilst she loved him for the very awkwardness of the effort, knowing that it was only genuine affection that could ever have forced him to the attempt.

"Oh, I see! There are two dogs after the hare. What of it? You have everything in your favour, youth, health, and a comfortable home to offer. If the young lady knows you as well as your old mother does she will see to it that you win the race."

"That is exactly what the other dog's mother thinks of him, you know! Besides, it does not depend upon the speed of the harriers in this case. They are chained to each other."

Gijs was beginning to stammer and blush, to the secret amusement of his mother, for she had long since divined his feelings, although the subject had never been broached between them. She knew perfectly well on whom her boy had set his heart, but had no idea that he had a rival in the field. She not only approved his choice but wished to see the early consummation of his desires.

"What a stupid way to hunt a hare! While the dogs are struggling with each other the hare will escape. Tell me all about it."

Tante Let laughed cheerfully, in a purposeful endeavour to put him at his ease, and showed such keen interest that Gijs overcame his embarrassment and gave a full account of all that had taken place between Wijnand and himself.

"So, you see, mother, I am bound by ties of honour and life-long friendship not to take any

advantage over Wijnand, and we both feel that the right course will be to let Nettie know the true state of affairs and leave her to decide."

Tante Let smiled. "I understand, of course, that men in love act like fools, but—to go to this length! Imagine you and Wijnand submitting yourselves to Nettie like two pairs of boots sent on approval, with a request to try them on and return the pair that does not fit!"

Even Gijs had to laugh at the absurdity of the situation as seen through his mother's eyes.

"Well, mother, what is your solution of the difficulty?"

"To begin with, letter writing is altogether out of the question. It has such a ring of insincerity about it, and frequently conveys the impression that the writer has not sufficient manliness to plead his cause in person. No girl cares for a proposal on paper. It shatters the sweet dreams of her girlhood, and makes the moment to which she has looked forward with a throbbing heart, cold and pulseless—a sort of commercial transaction, in fact. No, Gijs, a letter would be a great mistake, for, remember, what wins a girl's heart are not words—most girls are won before a single word is spoken—but looks, pleadings, earnestness; and, should she surrender herself, the lover must be there to kiss her, so that she may feel and realise the sweet sanctity of her betrothal. What then must a girl think of a man who would suffer a cold sheet of paper to take his place at such a moment?"

Tante Let was quite out of breath with her long

speech. Motherlike, her object was to ridicule Gijs out of his inborn shyness.

"I know so little about women's ways," Gijs said, diffidently. "You can hardly blame me if I don't know what to do."

"You are a goose! Open your eyes and look about you, and find things out for yourself. I thought that men were born with an abnormal propensity for love-making, and here am I actually teaching you the very rudiments of the art!"

"Really, mother, I never intended writing any letter to Nettie, but in fairness to each other, Wijnand and I agreed to do so in order that she might know that we both love her, as otherwise she might accept the first one who proposes, not knowing that the other would follow."

"Upon my word, you are a bright pair! You are going to tell her what she knows as well as you do yourself. You might as well write and say that the sun will rise to-morrow."

"Knows, mother, knows! Who on earth can have told her?" Gijs looked up, bewildered.

"Do you think that your confession was a revelation to me?"

"I have not spoken about it to any one save Wijnand. Surely he has not mentioned it?"

"You never spoke about it! Why you told me, you told her, and the whole world that you love her."

Gijs flushed crimson. He had stupidly thought that his secret was his only, and now that the truth dawned upon him and he realised the fact that not only Nettie but the whole district knew his feelings,

he felt like a guilty criminal who long ago committed a murder in some lonely solitude, only to discover later that unseen eyes had watched throughout.

Tante Let noticed his confusion, but continued in the same mood, as she wished to cure him of his timidity, and help him to become more self-reliant.

“There is no need to be dishonest with Wijnand; you can tell him plainly that in this matter each has to fight his own battle, and the loser must understand that the other is not to blame.”

The conversation lasted for some time before Tante Let kissed her son and retired for the night.

She felt alarmed that Gijs and Wijnand had both fallen in love with the same girl, for she feared that it might be the means of clouding a friendship which had existed from childhood.

Tante Let was a keen observer, and she had noticed that Nettie was giving signs of the gentler passion as well, otherwise she would not have encouraged her son in that direction. She took it for granted that Nettie's eyes had fallen on Gijs, but now that she knew that Wijnand also competed for the prize, she did not feel so sure of her ground.

Women are not so easy to read as men, on account of their natural powers of dissimulation, and yet Tante Let felt confident that her son's chances stood higher than his rival's, for, although in personal appearance he was not so prepossessing as Wijnand, his character and family connections were unblemished, and his social and financial standing secured; whereas Wijnand, being one of a large family, would not be able to dower his wife so liberally.

No sooner, however, did the thought flash across her mind, but Tante Let despised herself for it. She keenly felt the humiliation of the admission that she was trying to bolster Gijs up with worldly goods, to bring him on a level with his poorer rival, and to her he was all that a woman could wish for in a man.

She comforted herself with the thought that Nettie was one of those rare girls who looked beneath the surface, and could not be blinded by mere outward appearances, or the glitter and gild of things. Should it come to pass that Nettie preferred Wijnand, there were other fish in the sea, and she found herself already casting about in her mind for a substitute.

The next morning at sunrise Gijs fired off his usual salute to Wijnand, and as soon as the reply sounded on the still air he fired off another shot which Wijnand knew to be an invitation to come over.

Tante Let smiled when she heard the second report. It told her that her words had taken root, and that Gijs intended taking immediate action.

She had thought the matter over during the night, and decided not to mention it again to Gijs, unless he first approached her. She had expected to see him thoughtful and quiet the next morning, but was surprised to find him cheerful and in a gay mood, whistling some of his favourite tunes as he attended to his work on the homestead. Even at breakfast he chatted more than usual about certain improvements he intended making on the farm.

When Wijnand arrived he found him in the same

high spirits, so that he exclaimed on meeting him :—

“Hello! What’s up with you! Anything exciting in the wind?”

“On the contrary, things are very dull, and unless some excitement comes along, we shall die of the blues.”

Since Gijs understood that his mother approved of his intention to get married, and above all, when he realised that no letters need be written to Nettie, he became cheerful and buoyant. He disliked writing very much and the simplest note was quite beyond his literary attainments. Ever since his compact with Wijnand the thought of the letter had rested like a burden, and caused him many a sleepless night. Also he knew that sooner or later he would have to tell his mother about it, an event that he looked forward to as another unnerving ordeal to pass through.

Both difficulties having been unexpectedly overcome, it was small wonder that he felt elated and happy, and almost fancied he saw a successful issue to his hopes in the near future.

Gijs conducted Wijnand to a favourite spot of theirs, in the garden, where a rough seat had been constructed under the trees, and there he explained the situation.

“After all,” he said, “whether we write letters, or each plead his own case, one of us is bound to be rejected, and we must agree that our friendship will not suffer in consequence.”

Wijnand eagerly listened to every word that he said, and turning to his chum silently grasped him

by the hand. It was easy to acquiesce in this proposal, for each hoped that it would be the other upon whom the strain of the test would fall.

Wijnand was equally pleased to leave the letters out of the question, for he feared that, if Nettie were given time to consider the matter calmly, she would be bound to come to the conclusion that Gijs had the better claim, on account of his brighter material prospects, whereas he had hopes that by a personal proposal he would be able to persuade her to his own way of thinking.

"So it is understood that from to-day we are free to follow our own devices in fighting the battle of love, provided that we do so in a spirit of fair and open competition," said Wijnand. "I think it is the most sensible way, only we must try not to clash in our visits."

When the understanding was arrived at, both dropped the subject as completely as though it had never been mentioned at all, but their conversation lagged on other topics, and there was an absence of their usual outbursts of laughter, indicating that each was already formulating his plan of action.

Wijnand left earlier than usual, and it was a relief to each to be alone with his thoughts.

It was some considerable time since Nettie had seen Gijs, and she was secretly wondering at the long intervals between his calls, but in conversation with her father she learned that he was continually being sent for by other farmers to join in some Bushman hunt in the neighbourhood, and being alone on the farm, his time was fully occupied.

Wijnand she saw more often, as he came from time

to time on the pretext of seeing her father, or in regard to matters connected with the farm.

These visits generally ended in an interview with Nettie, and although she could not help seeing that he was deeply in love with her, he never once referred to it, which puzzled her greatly. Perhaps he was waiting for some sign of encouragement from her, but she was still undecided in her feelings. Often when alone with her thoughts, she would ponder deeply over the matter, and compare Wijnand and Gijs, but these comparisons always left her in the same unsettled frame of mind.

"Would that I were a fairy to make one man out of two," she said to herself. "I would take the best of each, and make a perfect man, and, when the compound was completed, would decline his advance with thanks, as I do not feel exactly fitted to mate with an angel. After all, a little pinch of a devil gives a flavour to the mixture."

However hard she tried to be serious in making up her mind, she always saw the humorous side of the situation, and invariably ended up with a laugh.

Wijnand's handsome face, curly hair and manly figure appealed to her, and quite eclipsed Gijs's personal attractions; he was more companionable and sociable too, whereas Gijs was always quiet and thoughtful. On the other hand, the latter was a far stronger man, one who forced respect, and carried all before him; one to whom, not only women, but all men must look up. He was her ideal of a man, the other of a lover.

Such was Nettie's state of mind when one Sunday

afternoon Gijs turned up at Kopje Aleen, riding Prince, well groomed and showing off to advantage.

Du Plessis, who saw him coming, welcomed him warmly on his dismounting. Nettie also came on to the stoep to greet him. "I am sure Tante Let sent you to ask how we all are, otherwise one never sees you."

"No," replied Gijs, "this time my own impulse has brought me to you."

"Indeed! Then your mammie does not know that you are out?" Nettie laughed merrily, while a soft blush suffused her face.

"Mothers generally know most things," returned Gijs, laughing as well. "It is rather embarrassing at times."

"Especially when the suspect is forced to the maternal confessional."

"And has to repeat what was only intended for the ears of his accessory."

The blush deepened on Nettie's face, for the hint was very pointed, and Gijs was also becoming embarrassed. She led the way into the house; where they were soon joined by the rest of the family, and the conversation lapsed into the commonplace.

Both Du Plessis and his wife were very attentive to Gijs, showing him as plainly as they could that he was a welcome visitor, and consequently the evening passed pleasantly in discussing general topics, until it became time for the household to retire to bed, when, without the least ceremony or excuse, Du Plessis and his wife bade Gijs good-night, and disappeared from the scene, leaving him alone with Nettie.

The Boer youth's idea of love-making is expressed in the term "Sitting up," which is a national institution.

Should a young man wish to make advances to a young woman, he asks her to sit up with him, and if she wishes to encourage him, she consents ; but should she be averse, she refuses, in which case he takes his departure early, and does not press his suit further.

Sometimes the girl makes the first advance, by asking the suitor to stay to supper, which includes an invitation for the subsequent sitting up.

After supper it is usual for the household to have divine service, and as soon as it is concluded the younger children are bundled off to bed, to be shortly afterwards followed by the parents, with perhaps a whispered warning from the mother to the daughter not to stay up too late.

When once the field is clear, there is no fear of intrusion by any member of the family, and the couple edge close to each other by way of introductory overture.

Generally such sittings last until very late at night, as it is considered uncomplimentary to the girl should the young man leave her presence too soon. It sometimes happens that the lovers, overcome by their vigil, fall asleep in their chairs, to be aroused the following morning by servants coming to make the early coffee, and the unfortunate couple are then so mercilessly chaffed, that nothing will induce either of them ever again to sit up with each other.

A chaperon is an unknown quantity in Boer

society, and it speaks highly for the Boer character that there are so few lapses from virtue and chastity in the ranks of their youth.

When, therefore, Gijs found himself alone with Nettie for the rest of the evening, there was nothing uncommon or embarrassing in the situation; still, when he thought of the object of his visit, he felt his courage sinking down to zero, and could with difficulty prevent himself from stammering when speaking.

He struggled with himself, and determined to be neither a fool nor a coward, only to discover that the hardest battle any human being can ever be called upon to fight in this life is to overcome some inborn trait in one's character.

Nettie was not slow to notice the change coming over Gijs, and endeavoured to keep the conversation in a bright and humorous strain, so as to draw him away from the serious thoughts she felt were struggling for utterance, and although she succeeded for a time, Gijs had made up his mind to speak out.

When at last he had sufficiently overcome his nervousness, he edged up boldly to her side and said :—

“ Nettie, I wish to tell you to-night what is in my heart. I have specially come over for that.”

Although her own heart beat faster, Nettie pretended not to understand his meaning.

“ What a relief that you are at last going to do some talking. I am tired of hearing myself. Is it some exciting incident from your eventful life ? ” and she gave a merry laugh.

“ It is the most serious one of my life,” Gijs

replied simply. "You know that I love you, and I have come to ask you to be my wife."

Nettie knew that it was coming—had known it for months past—and yet, now that the great question was put to her, she found herself without a reply.

Gijs had risen from his seat and was standing before her, looking straight down into her eyes for an answer. He had conquered himself completely, and, instead of stammering and blushing, he was now calm and collected.

Nettie had often wondered how he would behave at this critical moment, and had found some amusement in thinking how ridiculous he would make himself, but she had never until now seen the Gijs whom his friends called David.

He stood revealed to her, and she felt unnerved for the moment. A feeling of deep respect took possession of her, filling her with confidence in his strength, and drawing her with an almost irresistible force to him. Deep down in her soul a new power seemed to spring into life, overwhelming her with an unknown thrill, and she was just about to give way to its compelling sweetness, when Gijs, little dreaming what emotion he had called up, and misconstruing her silence, said:

"Perhaps it will be better for you to think the matter over calmly by yourself before you answer me."

Alas, for human limitations! Had he known that the fortress was won, that the psychological moment had arrived, that he need but have opened his arms, and said "Come," he would have pressed forward another step and entered into paradise.

His last sentence, however, had the effect of dispelling the mist from her eyes and releasing her from the momentary spell that was cast over her.

"Yes, it would be better for me to consider it first," she replied, "for although I like you very much I cannot honestly say that my mind is settled, as regards marriage; and besides, it would be as well for you to wait for a time to make sure your feelings do not change towards me."

"My feelings change towards you!" Gijs smiled that peculiar convincing smile which generally is the only answer of a strong mind to a doubt cast upon a statement, the truth of which should be beyond question.

"I have already put myself to the test, Nettie, for it was not yesterday that I discovered my love for you. I have known it for a long time, and as time went on, the passion grew stronger and stronger, until now you have become necessary to my very existence. If you will share my life I will do everything in my power to make you happy."

"And make a spoilt woman of me," said Nettie laughing. She had recovered herself, but her face was still suffused with blushes.

"As if any one could ever spoil you!" retorted Gijs.

"Oh, please don't imagine me an angel. I do so love to be only a woman sometimes, as you may soon find out."

"May I?" asked Gijs wistfully, misconstruing her meaning, and, before Nettie knew it, he had stooped down and kissed her on the mouth.

The action was so sudden, so unexpected from

the otherwise timid Gijs, that Nettie was completely taken by surprise and exclaimed.

“How dare you?”

“Oh, please forgive me! I do so love to be only a man sometimes.”

Nettie made no reply. She felt confused and bewildered at this new development in Gijs. To her he was always a shy youth, such as girls love to fool and play pranks on, but now she saw him in a different light, and instinctively felt that he was more than her match.

“When may I come for your answer, Nettie? Don’t keep me long, it will be torture to wait.”

“You can get my answer now, Gijs. Why should I keep you waiting? I cannot marry you.”

“Am I allowed to know what obstacle is in the way?”

“Yes, I do not love you sufficiently.”

She had become very serious, and there was just a suspicion of tremulousness in her voice. Try as she would, she could not look him in the face, but began fidgetting with her hands.

“I never thought you did,” replied Gijs calmly. “I am only too well aware of the fact that I am not blessed by nature with those attractions that are pleasing to women, but if you only knew how intensely I love you, and how my whole happiness depends on you, I am sure that you would at least tolerate my companionship, for I should endeavour to make you a good husband.”

“I do not doubt that in the least; in fact, you are far too good for me, but I really cannot.”

“Do you love any one else?” His voice grew

strangely husky, so much so that she looked up suddenly, alarmed. She met his pleading eyes fully, and felt almost hypnotised by the intensity of the yearning they expressed.

"No, Gijs. I am heart free, and may in time learn to love you as well as any one else, but until I do I shall never marry, for the greatest dread of my life is that I might marry and afterwards repent of it. If I do not love the man I marry, I might afterwards fall in love with another, and the position would be too painful to contemplate."

A sigh of relief escaped from Gijs, and his eyes softened, as he bent down and took her hand in his, which she allowed him to do. When he spoke again his voice was steady, but subdued.

"I have said that I love you as my life. I shall wait patiently, even if I have to wait for years, but I shall never give up hope—until I see you married to some one else."

"I am glad to hear you say that," replied Nettie, still with her hand in his, "for I esteem you very highly, and that is the more reason why I cannot marry you unless I love you whole-heartedly. To do otherwise would be to do you an injustice."

Then she withdrew her hand from his and adroitly turned the conversation into other channels, so that Gijs soon relapsed into his usual retiring ways and monosyllabic method of speech.

Nettie, however, seemed to grow brighter, and kept up a stream of bright cheerful talk, fearing that Gijs might refer to the subject again, for she could plainly see that he did not take her refusal as final.

This was to be expected at a time when custom laid it down that it was highly immodest for any girl to accept a man at once. Every right feeling and properly balanced feminine must temporize. How else could she put her lover's sincerity to the proof?

As Gijs rode home that night he was as cheerful as his nature permitted, for he had every reason to hope for ultimate success. He knew that he could not be accepted at once, and was quite prepared to provide undisputed proofs of his great love; in fact he entered into his period of probation with delight, deciding to press his suit frequently in order that his day of happiness might come the sooner.

Nettie, on the other hand, took things very seriously, when she found herself alone. It was the first time a man, in real earnest, had proposed marriage to her, and it was so different from what she had always imagined it would be.

She had been told by girl friends, who had passed through the experience, that men when proposing became flustered, behaved idiotically, and were humorously excessive in their declarations of love, as they used every persuasive argument in order to be accepted.

She had looked forward to some secret fun when a similar experience befell her, and lo, Gijs had turned the tables. He had become so unaccountably calm and strong, and exercised so curiously compelling an influence over her. Her very soul responded, and something beyond herself urged her to say "yes."

Was it the birth of love, or some strange passion she could not analyse?

CHAPTER XIII

WITTE'S GOOD RESOLUTIONS

TUKIE had just opened his store, and ordered the shop-boy to sweep and clean out—an extremely necessary process in the dust-swept village of Victoria West—when Andries Witte drove up, and steered straight into the shop-yard, as was his custom. Tukie immediately began shouting orders to his boys to attend to the horses and went forward to give his customer a fitting welcome.

“Really, I have not seen you for an age, Mr. Witte, and wondered what had become of you.” He shook Witte’s hand in a manner as though it were a real delight to see him again.

“Leave the boys to attend to your horses, and go into your room, while I fetch a nice warm cup of coffee, or, if you prefer an eye-opener instead, I will bring that. What you think?”

Witte understood the nature of an “eye-opener,” and said he preferred it to the cup of coffee, whereupon Tukie vanished round the corner to reappear again, carrying a glass of milk and brandy, which Witte gulped down with undisguised enjoyment.

It has been a matter of surprise to many that the Jew is always so successful and prosperous in

South Africa. Given two stores of equal importance in any town, one of which belongs to and is managed by a Jew, it will be found that this store receives far more support than the other.

The Dutch Boer cannot resist dealing with a Jew, however much to his disadvantage it may sometimes prove to be. To-day he will denounce all the ten tribes as the greatest thieves and swindlers on the face of the earth, but to-morrow he will unconcernedly pass by the store of his fellow-countryman to go to that of the Jew further down the street.

The reason is not difficult to explain. The average Jew is a natural student of human nature, and knows instinctively the weakness of each customer. This he instinctively pampers, and in such a way as to make the customer feel that he is the recipient of the storekeeper's favours.

Flattery and servility come as natural to the Jew trader as swimming to a duck, and as the average Boer, in common with the rest of mankind, is very susceptible to flattery, it is small wonder that the Jewish shop should receive a larger proportion of attention and patronage than its competitor over the way.

Tukie had many unflattering epithets bestowed upon him by the public. "That fool Tukie," "That idiotic Hebrew," "That silly little Jew." Even children sometimes addressed him in a disrespectful manner, but, with all that, no one had ever seen Tukie angry or heard a hasty retort from him.

The wonder was how he could bear all the chaff and insults from his various customers. Tukie

never complained, he only grinned, but sometimes when making out accounts in his little back office at night, he became so agitated at the recollection of a slight from the customer whose account he was then handling, that all power of correct calculation left him for the time, and unless the customer detected the error, Tukie, who would never think of revising the bill, got a bit of his own back.

"Well, Tukie, what news is there in town?" Witte felt cheered by the brandy and milk, and tried to be nice to Tukie in return.

"No particular news, Mr. Witte, except that every now and then we hear of some Bushmen being shot," replied Tukie.

"I wish they would shoot every one of them within a week," said Witte vehemently. "The sooner we purge the country of them, the sooner we shall be able to live in peace."

"Well, at the rate they are now being killed, we shall soon be free from them, unless the Government put a stop to it. What you think? Yesterday an official passed here on his way to Sterkfontein to make full investigation into the circumstances connected with the murder of the two boys."

"Really!" exclaimed Witte, turning a shade paler, "and what is he supposed to discover?"

"How can you ask of me, Mr. Witte? There is a rumour that the murderers were led by a Hottentot on horseback, and I believe there is some suspicion as to where this Hottentot can be found. Won't that be good? What you think?"

"Oh, yes, Tukie; I shall be glad if they can bring the murderers to justice."

"How can they bring the murderers to justice when they are all dead? Don't you remember that Brandt and his party shot them all!" exclaimed Tukie, in surprise.

"Then what do the Government want to investigate the matter for?" asked Witte.

"To try to bring to justice any one they can lay their hands on, especially the mysterious Hottentot, who may be a tool of some one else. What you think?"

At that moment a young Hottentot on horseback rode into Tukie's yard. He had ridden hard, for the horse was wet with perspiration, and panting for breath. The boy jumped off and lifted his hat to the white men, who both knew him as the coachman of old Koos Hough.

"Morning, Baas Tukie. I shall be glad to get forage and stabling for the horse." Then, seeing the questioning look on Tukie's face, he proceeded, "I rode very hard this morning to catch the post cart for Beaufort West. The Ou Baas died suddenly last night, and I had to post the letters to the children before the cart left."

"What! Ou Baas Koos Hough dead!" exclaimed Tukie, his little round eyes dilating with genuine surprise.

"Yes, Baas Tukie. The Ou Baas complained of a pain in his chest for the last few days, but no one thought seriously of it. Yesterday afternoon it suddenly grew worse, and during the night the Ou Baas died."

"I suppose the funeral will take place this afternoon?" asked Tukie.

"No, Baas, it will be to-morrow afternoon, so as to give the children time to be there. I have also brought a letter for Mr. Robart, the lawyer, to come out, so that the Ou Baas's will can be read after the funeral."

Within half an hour the news had spread through the little village, for Koos Hough was the richest man in the whole Karroo, and everybody was soon speculating as to the net amount his estate would realize.

There were many descendants to share in the estate, but it was generally understood that each one would inherit sufficient to be practically independent for life.

The news gave Witte food for reflection. He locked himself in his room, and remained there the greater part of the morning in solitary meditation.

His late wife was a daughter of old Koos Hough, and there were two children of the marriage, who undoubtedly would inherit their mother's share.

During old Koos Hough's lifetime, he had kept and maintained the children, but now that he was dead, the children would have to come back to their father, who would be their natural guardian.

Although Witte never manifested any paternal interest in his children, he felt now that it was his duty to protect their interests, especially as a substantial income was to be derived from the investment of their share in the estate, and, as the children were still very young, he would naturally have the handling and management of their money for many years to come.

With this end in view he went into Tukie's shop,

and with many expressions of sadness and regret at the death of his father-in-law, he proceeded to purchase a quantity of black crape and a ready-made black suit, to enable him to appear in due solemnity at the funeral.

"I feel, Tukie, that I must pay him the last tribute of respect, for whatever misunderstanding there might have been between us, he was nevertheless my late wife's father, and although he was the cause of the separation between us, I feel sure that he thought he was doing right."

"Quite so, Mr. Witte. I have no doubt that the old man did what was right, for he loved his children very much. What you think?"

Tukie, whose back was turned to Witte, in an attempt to get some suits from the shelves, winked at one of the clerks who was assisting him.

"What he did was not right, Tukie," Witte answered with some heat, "but one must be lenient with parents, and it is just because he loved his children, and did everything in his power for them that I can forgive the injustice I have suffered."

"And, besides, if one considers what the children and grandchildren are going to inherit, it becomes much easier to forgive. What you think!" Tukie replied, with a serious face.

"You darned Jews are always thinking of money," retorted Witte vehemently, "and you esteem a man only in proportion to his purse. It is disgraceful."

"No offence meant, Mr. Witte, no offence," hurriedly interposed the little salesman, "but,

personally, I could sooner forgive a relative who left me something than I could a poor one."

The inoffensive Tukie was a past master in the art of dissimulation, and consequently very quick to detect hypocrisy in others. Witte was only half satisfied with Tukie's apology, for he felt that the Jew had not only read him correctly, but was fooling him to his face. He, therefore, contented himself by venting his anger in terms of strong abuse against the whole Jewish tribe, denouncing them all as thieves and vagabonds.

In the meantime Tukie, "with a smile that was childlike and bland," managed to sell him a complete outfit for the funeral, and when at last Witte declared that, although he had money with him, he was not going to pay cash for his purchases, but wanted the goods entered, Tukie's smile broadened into a grin—that peculiar grin which generally settles on the face of one who knows that he has the best of the bargain, in spite of his opponent's temporary advantage.

"My dear Mr. Witte, the whole store is at your command. Take what you require, and I shall only be too pleased to enter everything for you. What you think?"

Thus flattered, Witte sauntered out of the shop to his room, muttering incoherently to himself about the dishonesty of the Jews in general, and that the best way to deal with them was to cow them into a sense of their own insignificance.

He opened the door of his room, and was about to enter when, suddenly, he stood still, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, for there, sitting on his

chair, was the identical stranger with the grey eyes and high-bridged nose, whom he had previously met in the same room.

"Come in and close the door." The man spoke in a commanding tone which seemed to irritate Witte, yet the door was instantly closed, and the key turned in the lock.

"A fine mess you have made of things," said the stranger, with something like a snarl.

Witte made no immediate reply, but seated himself leisurely on the bed, as there was only one chair in the room. He was not in the mood that morning to play lamb to any one's wolf, and he of the high-bridged nose was by no means slow in observing it. Witte looked straight into the grey eyes and said: "It is a custom with me, on meeting any one, to bid him the time of day, and if I have any grievance, to enquire into circumstances before I condemn."

"With me it is customary not to hide my feelings under a semblance of civility, nor to waste time in enquiring into circumstances that are well known to me."

The retort was given with emphasis on each word, calculated to subdue the spirit of rebellion that so strangely manifested itself in the hitherto pliant tool.

"That saves a lot of time in explanations," replied Witte unflinchingly. "Come to the point."

"The point is that you have the blood of innocents upon your hands." As he spoke slowly, the man watched keenly the effect of this shot upon his victim, but he might have stared at a marble bust with equal success.

"Go on." Witte seemed calmer than ever.

"And through your blundering you have placed yourself in the power of your servant and a number of Bushmen, who may at any moment turn upon you. Your connection with the actual murder may be too remote for hanging, but what if Brandt and Uijs were to trace the murder to your door?"

"How?"

"You are not so simple as you pretend. The first Bushman who is caught will blurt out the truth, or sufficient to put the police on your track."

"And to what am I to ascribe your kindness in telling me this?"

"A desire to protect you from the consequences."

"Thank you; but you might have spared yourself the trouble, for I have nothing to fear."

Witte's exasperating coolness and indifference were becoming too much for his opponent, whose temper became ruffled in proportion to his failure in impressing upon his victim the unpleasant possibilities of his position.

"You place too much reliance upon natives, as you may soon discover to your cost. If, for the sake of a few pocket knives, they were ready to shed the blood of innocent children, what will they not do for a few bottles of brandy?"

That shaft evidently found its mark, for Witte visibly started, although he pulled himself together at once, and resumed his former attitude of callousness. Where did this man get his information from, and what more did he know? Witte, however, was determined to break with him once and for all, and was not going to show the white feather.

But he knew that he had to be very cautious and make no blunders.

There was a slight pause in the conversation, and Witte felt that his momentary weakness had been duly observed and would be taken advantage of.

"You interest me, please go on."

There was just the faintest tremor in Witte's voice, and it caused a smile of victory to flit across his opponent's face.

"It is interesting, as you remark, and I like to grapple with difficult problems, especially when it amounts to baffling the police and saving a friend. I will admit, if you wish it, that in protecting you I am studying my own interest as well, as I can ill afford to see you in trouble before old scores are settled up. Now that your father-in-law is dead you will soon be in funds, and can pay off old debts; but it takes time finally to liquidate estates."

"I was not aware of the fact that any unsettled accounts existed between us," said Witte in the same calm voice and looking straight at his enemy.

This time it was the other's turn to look disconcerted. Witte's provoking coolness was irritating, but the absolute denial of his indebtedness was the last straw. A dangerous light shot into the grey eyes. Witte knew the crisis was at hand.

"What!" almost shouted his opponent. "Do you think for one moment that you can get out of paying me by simply denying that you owe me anything. Look here, Andries Witte, I have been lenient with you for a long time, but I now give you fair warning that unless you pay me every

penny due to me, within the next month, the police will be in possession of such information as will make you regret the day that you were born."

"Why let the police wait? Do it now. I will go with you!" Witte rose and reached out for his hat, but the other remained sitting, completely defeated by this unexpected answer.

"Come along," Witte continued calmly. "There is no time like the present."

The grey eyes watched him in impotent rage, for the truth was revealed in a flash that they had lost their hypnotic power over their erstwhile victim, and that threats were equally futile to compel submission to their sway. Clearly the tactics must be changed,

"Sit down, Andries, you are mad and don't know what you are doing. I wish to reason with you for your own benefit."

The tone of the speaker's voice became less domineering.

Witte walked to a little table at his bedside, on which stood a small leather "hold-all" which he always carried with him when travelling. He opened it, took from it an old-fashioned pistol and with the greatest deliberation sat down.

"I am so glad that you are now prepared to listen to reason, and I wish you to take heed of what I am going to say, and not to interrupt me until I am finished."

Witte did not raise his voice, but the deadly earnestness of his tone went home to the other.

"I had been a good, honest, hardworking man all my life, until I met you, and from that moment

my downward career commenced. I have wickedly allowed myself to be tempted by you, and you knew so well how to play your cards that you soon had me completely in your power.

"Within a few years you not only had every penny I possessed, but I was deeply in your debt, and, although I grew up an honest man, I became, in your hands, a criminal, so that I was the helpless slave of your wishes, for fear of being exposed. To meet your demands for money, I robbed my late wife, and forced her to extort money from her father, until at last her life under my roof became such a misery that she fled from me, only to die later on of shame and a broken heart.

"To be brief, you have made me live a life of villainy, so that now I am the despised of my fellow-men, and to-day you try to make me out a murderer as well.

"God knows that I am innocent of the blood of those children. It was an unlooked-for circumstance against which no provision could be made, but—but——" Witte paused slightly, overcome by emotion, and wiped his forehead on which beads of perspiration were beginning to gather, "—I am guilty of my wife's death."

As he uttered these words his face turned white, his lips quivered, and he had again to pause to recover his self-possession.

Once or twice his listener made an effort to interrupt him, but was silenced by a motion of the hand.

After a while he continued in a slightly husky voice. "No one knows the hell through which

I have lived during the last few years, except God and my wife, whose face haunts me in my dreams every night ; and if dreams are true, then she knows my suffering and has forgiven me.

“ Of all this misery and crime that have come into my life, you, and you alone, are the cause. You have forced me to lie and deceive for the sake of money, and yet I always found myself getting deeper and deeper into your clutches, until at last I was in fear of my very life from you. You have hidden your identity and whereabouts from me, but that did not matter, for I have long since discovered both.

“ The amount due by me to you I repudiate as gambling debts, which you cannot legally claim, and any effort on your part to harry me for it will meet with immediate and sure punishment.

“ You have threatened me with the police, but I can assure you that I am now driven to such an extremity that I have no fear of the law. And, be further assured, that should I ever be made to face a judge, you will stand next to me in the dock. There is, however, another and more convincing reason why I do not fear prosecution, and I wish you to listen carefully to what I am going to say. You have heard the saying that there comes a time when even a worm will turn. Well, the worm has turned completely now. From this day forth every connection between us must be broken, and all intercourse must cease. You have accused me of having blood on my hands. Let that be. But I now tell you that if, after this day, you in any way, either yourself or by your agent,

interfere with me directly or indirectly, or in any way molest, or speak to me, I will then and there shoot you like the cur you are, and nothing shall stop me from steeping my hands in your blood, unless you shoot me first.

"I have now spoken my mind, and have only to add that I have nothing to listen to from you, and that unless you vanish from my sight within the next ten minutes, this sleepy little village will be convulsed with the startling news of a murder."

Throughout his long speech, Witte never once raised his voice, but its grating emphatic tone, more than anything else, convinced the hearer of the speaker's deadly earnest.

As soon as he had stopped talking, he pulled out his watch and said, in the same unwavering tone, "Quarter to eight."

The expression on the face of the listener changed several times as the recital proceeded. Scorn, surprise, protest and anger had each expressed itself in turn, and when the speech reached its end, the dominant expression was one of hatred mingled with fear.

There was an ugly greenish tint in the grey eyes, as their owner rose slowly from his chair and went towards the door. Holding the door knob in his hand, he turned round and said, "To-day you have lost a friend who would have helped you through thick and thin, and you will regret your resolution before many weeks are over."

A moment later the door closed and Witte found himself alone, listening to the retreating footsteps of his whilom companion. He replaced his watch

which he was still holding in his hands, and put the pistol in the inside breast-pocket of his coat ; then resting back in his chair, he became lost in thought.

Instinctively he felt that he was for ever rid of the malign influence that had urged him from bad to worse, but he had some vague fear of coming trouble.

He, however, determined to brave it out, come what might, and told himself that it were better to be dead than to slave for an evil influence that would drag him down to the lowest depths.

Having thus rid himself of the incubus that had hung over his life, he set himself the task of recovering the severe losses he had sustained through gambling and speculation. He knew that his financial position was hopeless, and unless he obtained assistance from some one he would not be able to recover himself.

To apply to any relatives or acquaintances would be futile, as none would trust him, owing to past experiences.

In his insatiate greed for wealth he had staked his all, and had lost, a fact which seemed to be generally known, and which effectually precluded him from obtaining any substantial help.

He had long since given up all expectations from his parents-in-law, but now that both were dead, hope sprung up afresh.

The old Dutch Boer was very careless about putting his house in order, and it was just possible that old Koos might have left a will of the old-fashioned class, bequeathing the whole estate to the

children in equal shares, in which case he would, as natural guardian of his children, get the management and control of the share that would come to them through their mother.

He would invest the little fortune wisely and well and rehabilitate his name, so that when his children grew up they would call him blessed.

CHAPTER XIV

A THUNDERSTORM

“**I** DO not feel that it is right for me to go to the funeral, while you are sick, mother,” said Gijs, with an expression of real concern on his face.

Tante Let smiled at her son to banish his fears, and assured him that she would soon be herself again. “Don’t forget the kindness others have shown us in our time of trouble ; and, besides, the dead claim our respect. You must certainly go, and offer to assist as far as you can.”

Tante Let had returned the previous evening from a neighbouring farm where a child was lying ill. She had watched over the little bedside for two nights, performing those tender ministrations which only a true-hearted woman knows how to do. As the patient was battling for life through the crisis of a severe fever, the watcher remained on continual guard, unmindful of her own discomfort and failing strength, until the danger was overcome.

When Tante Let reached her own home, she was exhausted to the verge of collapse. She retired very early, promising herself a good undisturbed night’s rest, but, as is often the case under such circumstances, her slumbers were fitful and intermittent,

so that next morning she had a severe headache, and had to remain in bed.

Wijnand called that morning on his way to the funeral, and invited Gijs to take a seat in his cart, but it required all Tante Let's persuasion to make him go, and, when at last he reluctantly accepted Wijnand's offer, it was only after dispatching Jantje with a note to Mrs. Brandt, asking her to call round during the day to see his mother.

From Sterkfontein to Papkuil, Koos Hough's farm, was estimated at about four hours' hard riding, and as the funeral was to be held that afternoon Gijs knew that it would be very late indeed by the time he returned.

As they were driving away from the homestead, Wijnand pointed out a little pig and said, "I hope that young brute is not telling a lie."

The pig was running amok in all directions, frisking in playful mood, an exhibition that is regarded by all Boers as an infallible foreshadowing of rain.

Gijs looked at the small animal and smiled. "Jantje told me that he saw lightning towards the north, at about first cockcrow this morning."

The weather is by far the most frequently recurring topic in the Boer's conversation, and any one acquainted with the periodic droughts, extending over many months, to which the Karroo is subject, will sympathise with the wilderness dwellers, and make allowances for the monotonous frequency of their reference to atmospheric conditions.

"Well, if we don't get rain soon, it will be a serious matter," said Wijnand. "Many are already

trekking with their stock, and our own water supply cannot hold out longer than another week."

For fully half an hour the conversation dwelt upon drought with all its attendant hardships, until it seemed that neither had anything more pleasant to talk about.

They had not met since the day on which they had agreed to try their luck, and Gijs was burning to hear whether Wijnand had already proposed to Nettie. But he would not broach the subject first, though Wijnand was equally anxious to know what progress his friend had made.

Each was waiting for the other's confession, which sooner or later, would surely be forthcoming ; but as neither spoke out, the conversation became strained and unnatural, with long intervals between.

Gijs at last came to the conclusion that Wijnand had met with a better reception than himself, though he refrained from telling him so, out of respect for his feelings. At last he could keep silence no longer : " What luck have you had ? " he asked.

" None. You ? "

" None."

Involuntarily a sigh of relief escaped from both, and now that the condition of doubt and uncertainty was removed, they soon brightened into their usual state of cheerfulness and good-humour.

Wijnand pulled up the horses to give them a breather, while Gijs filled his pipe, and offered his tobacco pouch to his friend.

" So it is a case of ' as we were ' ? " laconically remarked Wijnand.

“ Except that we have added to our experiences the knowledge of a refusal.”

Both laughed at this new phase of wisdom, and, dropping all constraint, became confidential again. Wijnand persuaded Gijs to relate all that had passed between himself and Nettie, and though the story was told in a halting, garbled manner, it was nevertheless a fairly accurate account.

Wijnand listened eagerly, and when Gijs had finished his recital said: “ You have just told me word for word exactly what took place between Nettie and myself, except that in my case she added that she was sorry I had spoken at all.”

Both remained silent for a considerable time, lost in thought, as they idly watched the little grey, black-breasted Karroo birds flocking to the out-span to feed. So tame are these birds that they will come within the reach of a whip, and Wijnand occasionally struck out at any one that was bolder than the rest, and allowed the cart to pass close to it without stirring.

“ What do you intend doing next ? ” asked Gijs, turning to his companion.

“ Hope on and trust to luck,” replied Wijnand, absently.

“ I suppose there is nothing else to be done ; but the quicker she makes up her mind the more comfortable it will be for us. It is intolerable to be everlastingly on tenterhooks.”

“ Perhaps we are not even in the running.”

“ Then the sooner we know it the better, but I have no fear on that score. She told me emphati-

cally that she was heart-free, and she is certainly truthful."

"I do not mean to imply that she has hidden anything from us. What she said might be quite true of to-day—but who can tell what may happen to-morrow?"

"You or I must oust any outsiders, and keep Nettie in the family," and Gijs indicated by a wave of the hand that by "family" he meant Wijnand and himself. Both chuckled at the idea.

What with discussing the topic nearest their hearts, and filling and refilling their pipes, the journey soon came to an end. Halfway they had taken their horses from the cart to give them a drink and rest, so as to keep them fresh, and it was just after the dinner-hour when they arrived at Papkuil.

They were not the first arrivals. Several carts were already standing about the werf, mostly those of near friends and relatives; while other vehicles were seen approaching in the distance. They were received by some members of the family who, according to custom, ushered them into the house to greet the sorrowing ones, and view the corpse, which lay in an open coffin.

All the deceased's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were there, and when, later on, Andries Witte also arrived, the fact caused some astonishment, and gave rise to whispered comments among the crowd, as all knew of the strained relationship that had existed between him and the deceased.

Some thought that it was the right thing for him to do, while others ascribed sinister motives to his

coming, arguing that, as he had not made his peace with deceased in his lifetime, he should have remained away altogether.

By the time the funeral was to commence a large crowd had collected, including the Reverend Mr. Lelieveldt, who had come from town to conduct the service, bringing the sexton with him.

The short and impressive service was soon over, and the coffin lowered into the grave. The relatives and friends then approached in turn, and dropped a handful of sand upon the coffin, as a mark of respect to the departed. This done, the sexton closed the ceremony with the stereotyped expression—"On behalf of the surviving relatives, friends present are thanked for the last respect shown to the deceased"—which was also the signal for the crowd to disperse and go their several ways.

Papkuil was by no means an attractive farm, and it was difficult to believe that its owner had been without exception the richest man in the district. The dwelling-house was low and insignificant, presenting an unplastered and dilapidated appearance, surrounded by a few mean looking cattle kraals, stables and sheds, which by no means added to the beauty of the homestead.

No attempt whatever had been made at horticulture, trees being conspicuous by their absence. Yet it was considered a valuable farm, owing to the excellence of its veld, which extended over an area of not less than twenty thousand morgen. All minds were speculating as to its fate, now that its late owner was dead.

As soon as the funeral was over, Mr. Robart sent

word to the children of the deceased to meet him in the dining-room, to hear the will read—an invitation to which immediate effect was given.

Old Koos was not only richly blessed in worldly goods, but also in children, so that Mr. Robart soon found himself surrounded by a pretty large attendance, eager to hear the wishes of their late father, yet making the most ludicrous efforts to appear indifferent.

Here one would sit with arms folded, staring at the ceiling as though he had no interest in the proceedings, and there another would talk in an undertone to his neighbour about the drought and immediate prospects of rain, while others would sigh solemnly, and wipe away occasional tears with brightly coloured handkerchiefs, pretending that their grief at deceased death's outweighed all worldly considerations.

Yet in spite of this show of indifference there was a strong undercurrent of excitement and inquisitiveness, for none, save Mr. Robart, knew the contents of the will; and he, lawyer-like, was silent as the grave, for all the information any heir could get out of him before the appointed time.

Andries Witte had taken a seat in the room, and many a furtive glance was cast in his direction, for all expected that something unpleasant was in store for him.

When every one was seated and the door closed a middle-aged female, the eldest child of the deceased, rose and went into an adjoining bedroom, whence she presently emerged carrying a small tin canister.

This she deposited on the table in front of Mr. Robart and handed him a small key.

The lawyer gravely unlocked the canister, and from a packet of documents selected an official-looking envelope duly closed and sealed with a wafer, and bearing the superscription, "Last Will and Testament of Jacobus Johannes Hough."

He drew the attention of all present to the fact that the envelope was intact, and then he tore it open, extracted the contents, and lay back in his chair preparatory to reading it aloud.

The will was of the old-fashioned sort, printed on blue paper, with suitable blanks for filling in the names of heirs, executors, and such conditions as the testator might think fit, and began with the solemn phrase, "In the name of God, Amen."

Coming at last to the nomination of heirs, it ran—"As my sole and universal heir, I nominate and appoint my children begotten in lawful wedlock, in equal shares, and in the event of any of my heirs predeceasing me, then the descendants of such predeceased heir shall succeed to their father's or mother's portion, as the case may be, by representation."

The rest of the will contained the appointment of executors, with instructions as to the liquidation and administration of the estate, both movable and immovable, and ended with the testator reserving to himself the power at all times to alter his will, as he might think fit, either by a separate act or at the foot of the will, desiring that all such additions to or alterations might form part of his will.

The strict impartiality of the dead seemed to give

offence, judging by the looks of disappointment clearly depicted on certain faces. Evidently some of the heirs expected some special mark of favour, and, clearly, it was thought that some exception would have been made in the case of Witte and his children.

Mr. Robart replaced the will in the envelope, and put it on the table, then searching the contents of the canister again, he produced another envelope, which he likewise held up to show that the seals were intact. All eyes were anxiously watching him as he opened out the document.

"This is a codicil to the will," he said, "written about four months ago."

He again lay back in his chair and began to read.

Written by virtue of the codiciliary clause contained in the testament, it invoked the aid of the law to declare it part of the will already made. It provided for the proper collation of all money advanced to heirs during the lifetime of deceased, in order to bring about a fair and just distribution of the estate amongst them, and then contained a long list of amounts due by each child to the estate.

The reading of this list was received with mixed feelings, as some of the heirs had received no advance from deceased, while others again had nearly exhausted their whole inheritance.

It was generally believed that Witte's late wife had received from her father far more than her share of inheritance, owing to the pressure put upon her by Witte, but it now appeared that in reality

she had received much less than many of the others, and that a substantial amount would devolve upon her children.

Mr. Robart was interrupted in his reading by sundry expressions of surprise and dissent, as the list of indebtedness was called out, several heirs protesting that they had never received anything like the amount placed opposite their names; but the deceased evidently kept strict reckoning of all amounts he had advanced to his children, for the codicil continued :—

“ As it was my wish and desire neither to make any distinction between my heirs, nor to show any favour to any of my children above the others, I have conscientiously kept account of all advances made to them during my lifetime, and I therefore direct that any child, disputing the amount of his indebtedness as set forth in this codicil, shall *ipso facto* be entirely disinherited, and debarred from all benefits whatsoever under my will.”

Either the deceased was a close student of human nature, or else he knew that there existed great disparity in the characters and dispositions of his offspring. At any rate, this clause acted as a damper on all signs of rebellion, and the reader was allowed to continue in peace :—

“ Whereas my daughter Anna predeceased me, leaving issue, I will and direct that the inheritance devolving upon her children, by representation, in terms of my will, shall be deposited with the Master of the Supreme Court of this Colony, and the whole amount shall so remain deposited, until her youngest child shall have attained the age of twenty-one years,

when, only, her inheritance shall be equally divided amongst her children. The annual income derived from such investment, I direct to be paid over to the executors of my will, to be by them applied to the maintenance and suitable education of the said children, hereby appointing my said executors as tutors over the said children, with all power and authority allowed by law."

This was a thunderbolt to Andries Witte, and he felt that all eyes were directed upon him, but he gave not the slightest facial indication of his feelings, and remained calm and indifferent to all outward appearances until the end.

Mr. Robart replaced the will and codicil in the canister, and handed it over to the two sons nominated as executors, shook hands with each one present, and took his departure.

Gijs and Wijnand had left immediately after the ceremony, as they had a long way to go, and it was already late in the afternoon.

Dark thunder-clouds had gathered on the horizon during the afternoon, threatening travellers with a drenching and a wet road. Although a good rain was very much to be desired just then, any one who had passed through a thunderstorm in the Karroo, especially in an open cart, would suffer any inconvenience or delay rather than face such a nerve-racking experience.

Wijnand urged his horses to their best travelling speed, to cover as much distance as possible before dusk, for, on a dark rainy night, it is a difficult matter to distinguish the road from the surrounding veld, owing to the numerous bare patches of ground,

without a bush or blade of grass on them, through which the road leads.

Many a traveller in the Karroo has so completely lost his way that he has been compelled to call a halt, and remain where he was until daylight came to show him his whereabouts.

After a while the clouds became blacker, and an occasional flash of lightning gave warning of an approaching storm.

"It is no use trying to get through that," said Wijnand, looking at the horizon. "We had better stop for the night at Haaskraal."

As they were travelling in an open buggy, without wraps of any kind, and not even the inevitable kaross, Gijs reluctantly consented; although he felt concerned about his mother, and would have liked to go on. Still he knew from experience the futility of trying to keep to the road on a dark, rainy night.

Haaskraal was a farm about three miles ahead, the residence of Jan Olivier, a maternal uncle of Wijnand's.

"If you intend reaching Haaskraal before we get soaked to the bone you had better drive on like blazes, for those clouds mean business, and we have not a moment to waste."

Wijnand by whip and voice urged his horses to their utmost, and it became a race between them and the storm. The result was a narrow win for the horses, for, as they pulled up at Olivier's stoep, a blinding flash heralded the beginning of the downpour. No time was lost in unhitching and stabling the horses, and pushing the buggy into a

shed, the spattering heavy drops hastening the operation.

A Karroo thunderstorm at night must be seen and experienced to be appreciated at its true worth and splendour. No language can adequately describe its awe-inspiring, yet fascinating, display of lightning, mere words could never convey a true idea of the grand majestic volumes of sound, which burst upon the ear with sudden deafening claps, to roll away in immense reverberating peals, echoing and re-echoing through infinity of space.

At first the flashes were intermittent, with intervals of from one to two minutes, as though to allow time for due appreciation of each spectacular effect. Then a brilliant fork suddenly illumined the landscape with the light of noonday, only to plunge everything into inky blackness the next second.

Whilst the eye strove to pierce the surrounding gloom, another flash, flickering and fantastic of design, darted like a flaming serpent from the obscurity of the upper sky to the depths of the earth.

The intervals became shorter and shorter, the volleys louder and louder, until the heavens were lit up from end to end with an ever-changing panorama, compared with which the greatest masterpiece of the most inspired artist would dwindle away to an insignificant nothingness.

Silence, deathly silence, for a brief moment, and then, once more, crash upon crash, volley after volley, vying with the other in deafening mutterings, as though all the destructive batteries of an enraged god were malignantly directed upon the sombre and trembling earth below.

During the first part of the heavy storm only a few large drops of rain fell here and there, but, later, the water came down in the proverbial bucketsful, and within a few minutes each depression in the ground was a pool, and every furrow and sloop a foaming torrent.

Inside Olivier's house every one was very silent, for the storm enveloped the whole place, and at any moment one of those serpentine streaks of lightning might strike a chimney. The family sat idle and depressed—Mrs. Olivier, with a baby in her arms, her second youngest, a girl of four, crouching on a footstool, nestling her head in her mother's lap to muffle the sound of the awful crashes overhead; and a little boy of seven, who rested his white, terrified face against his father's knee, and clung to the strong arms that encircled him.

The thunder wore itself out as the storm passed on to the east, and within the hour, as is the way with South African tempests, it had completely spent itself, and disappeared mysteriously as it had come.

Where a moment before, the elements warred against each other, there now reigned a perfect solemnity of peace. The stars shone down through the purified ether on the earth below, whose roaring waters sent up a song of praise.

Olivier and his guests went out to the sheep and cattle kraals to see if any material damage had been done, and to feed and water Wijnand's horses, which had been hurried into the stable without any attention at all.

It has very often happened in South Africa that lightning, striking a flock of sheep, has killed a great

number in one flash, as many as eighty at a time, so that a severe storm passing over a farm causes the farmer very great anxiety whilst it lasts. The damage caused by lightning, however, is trifling to the devastation wrought by a hailstorm. Hailstones the size of a man's fist, falling from such a distance, can slay cattle and sheep by hundreds and sweep away the standing crops as effectually as any raging fire.

Fortunately such hailstorms are exceptional, and when one does occur, it marks an epoch in the life of the farmer who happens to be the victim. Thenceforward he refers to events as, "so long before the hail," or "so long after the hail." The storm becomes a new *anno domini* in the chronicles of time.

As the sun appeared on the eastern horizon the following morning, Gijs arrived at his home. It is usual for Boers to rise before daybreak, and to do all travelling in the early hours in order to avoid the great heat of the day.

He was still a considerable distance from the homestead, when he noticed a Cape cart standing before the house, which he immediately recognised as belonging to Du Plessis.

The accuracy with which Boers can recognise and describe vehicles and animals at great distances is astonishing. When once a Boer has seen either near by, he will again recognise them, although two or three miles from him. A peculiarity in the gait, build, or even the switch of the tail, suffices, and mistakes are very seldom made.

As they approached the farm another cart was

seen standing at the side of the house, which Wijnand recognised as his father's buggy.

The sight of his neighbours' vehicles increased Gijs's anxiety, and he urged Wijnand to hurry his horses on.

As soon as they reached the house he jumped off the cart, and hurried into the house, to be met in the dining-room by Mrs. Brandt, who held up her hand in token of silence.

"Your mother is asleep, don't disturb her now," she said in soft undertones.

"What is the matter with her?" asked Gijs. He felt uneasy at Mrs. Brandt's manner.

"She took bad soon after I came yesterday, and became worse just about sunset, and was very restless all through the night, but about an hour ago she fell into a peaceful sleep, which we hope will soon restore her."

"But what is really the matter, and what can we do?"

"We cannot say yet, nor can she tell us; but she had a very high temperature, and we gave her something to break the fever. She is slightly better now. Mrs. Du Plessis is with her."

"When did she come?"

"I sent Jantje over to fetch her yesterday, when your mother got bad, and she and Nettie came immediately. When Mrs. Du Plessis saw your mother's condition she insisted upon sending for Dr. Hanau, and wanted to despatch Jantje, but Nettie would not hear of his leaving the farm, as he might be required during the night, so she went herself."

"What!" The exclamation embodied a world of meaning, and his brows contracted sharply.

"We tried our best to dissuade her, but to no purpose. She ordered Jantje to saddle Prince, and, while we were still pleading, she left, saying that as she could not be of any help in the sick room, she would gladly do that for Tante Let."

"On Prince in that storm!"

The muscles on Gijs's face were twisting with suppressed emotion and anxiety.

Prince was a very restless horse, and prone to shy at any object, especially at night time; besides, he had never been ridden by a lady before. There was no lady's saddle on the farm either, and to do a six hours' ride on a man's saddle would be extremely uncomfortable and exhausting. What Gijs feared most of all was that she might have been overtaken by the storm, away from any homestead; in which case Prince would become unmanageable, and the consequences to Nettie would be disastrous.

"She left three hours before sunset," continued Mrs. Brandt, "so that the doctor may turn up at any moment."

"If she ever reached there!" Gijs replied, going out to find Wijnand, whom he had left to attend to the horses.

When Wijnand saw his friend's face, he knew at once that something serious had happened.

Gijs explained in a few hesitating sentences what he had just heard, and, as Wijnand realised the peril to which Nettie must have been exposed, he also became grave and troubled.

A consultation took place between them, for it was felt that something had to be done at once. Gijs clearly could not leave the farm in his mother's present condition, so that it devolved upon Wijnand to start immediately for Victoria West, and fetch both Nettie and the doctor.

Mrs. Brandt heartily approved of her son's sudden departure and urged him to hurry on, until he had satisfied himself as to Nettie's safety.

"Does her father know that she has gone?" asked Gijs.

"No; how can he? He left shortly after dinner yesterday, and we told him that if Tante Let got worse we could let him know, otherwise Nicht Betty would return this afternoon."

"How did he get home?"

"He left his cart here for his wife to return with, and walked back, saying that he wished to go through the veld to see to his cattle."

"Should we not let him know?"

"If she does not turn up this afternoon, it would be advisable, but I hope that she will be here before then, as Nicht Betty is very, very anxious."

At these words Mrs. Du Plessis herself walked into the kitchen to greet the young man. She looked haggard and careworn. All through the night she had watched at Tante Let's bedside, in an unbroken vigil of solicitous care for the sick with her mind racked with anxiety for her daughter.

"She is sleeping quite soundly now," she said in reply to Gijs's questioning look, "and I feel sure that after a few hours' rest, she will feel very much better."

It was a great relief for her to hear that Wijnand was going in search of Nettie, and she impressed upon him the urgency of returning as soon as possible, to set her fears at rest.

Wijnand required no hurrying up from others, for his own heart was impelling him, at all speed, to fly to the assistance of the girl he loved, and within a few minutes after his arrival at Sterkfontein he was again on the road.

He did not spare his horses, for he knew that he could get fresh relays on the way, and he determined within four hours to cover the distance, which ordinarily took six.

CHAPTER XV

A TOWN IN FLOOD

NETTIE fully realised the discomfort she would have to endure for six hours on horseback, and knew that Prince required tact in management, and constant watchfulness.

Although an expert horsewoman, she dreaded riding alone at night—the pitfalls on the Karroo roads were so many. But having set herself the task, for the sake of her old friend, she meant to carry it through, no matter what might happen.

Prince behaved well, and responded readily to the slightest touch on the rein, as he covered mile after mile of the long, dreary road.

Coming to the Brak River, where they had outspanned on their return from Nachtmaal, Nettie met an old Hottentot and his wife driving a flock of hungry looking sheep.

As it was just about half-way to the dorp, and close upon sunset, she decided to dismount and give the stallion a drink and a breather. Calling the old man she bade him hold Prince's head and take him to water.

"Where is the Klein Nooi going?" enquired the woman, interestedly, as her husband led the horse away.

"To town, Ayah, to fetch the doctor for a sick woman."

"It is still far. Is the Klein Nooi not afraid to travel in the dark?"

"I don't like it, Ayah; but necessity compels."

"Within an hour it will rain, and the Klein will get wet."

Nettie had already noticed the heavy clouds coming over, but was hoping that the rain would hold off until she had reached her destination.

"I am not afraid of rain, Ayah, but I dread the thunderstorm, as my horse is very shy, and may become unmanageable."

"Then the Klein Nooi must not think of going on to-night, for there will be heavy thunder and lightning. Baas Jan Cilliers lives just over that rise," pointing in a direction at right angles to the road. "The Klein Nooi had better go there, and wait until the storm is over."

"Are you and your husband working on that farm?"

"Yes, Klein Nooi, we are taking these sheep there now."

Nettie looked again at the clouds and tried to make up her mind. They certainly did not inspire her with sufficient confidence to risk herself alone on the road any further, and yet her mission was a most urgent one. It might mean that Tante Let's life depended upon it, and, if she were to lose courage now, and something serious should happen to Tante Let, it would be an everlasting reproach to her. She felt that there was nothing for it but to go on, and she determined to brave the storm,

secretly praying that her fears might prove groundless.

When the old Hottentot returned with Prince, he said :

“ Klein Nooi must not risk being caught in the storm. After a drought like this, the lightning is always very dangerous.”

“ I must go on, Outa, for I am fetching a doctor for a sick woman, and there is no time to lose.”

The word “ outa,” meaning “ old father,” is only used by Europeans when addressing elderly native males. The word has changed in meaning, like so many others, and now signifies a native man, in the same way as “ ayah ” signifies a native woman. Thus, should any one address a half-caste as “ outa,” it would be taken as an insult. Natives acknowledge the term as a proper address only when coming from white people, and resent it from any other. Should a half-caste address a native as “ outa,” the indignant reply would be, “ I am not your outa—you are as black as I am.”

“ If the Klein Nooi must go, she must ride very fast to reach Osfontein, which is hardly two hours from here. Perhaps Klein Nooi may reach it before the storm breaks, and from there the Baas Japie may take Klein Nooi in his cart.”

Nettie thanked the old man for his kind solicitude, and promised to do as he advised. She still had half an hour's daylight at her disposal, and meant to make the most of it, as she would have to slacken pace as soon as it became dark.

The rest and drink had refreshed Prince considerably, for he cantered well and steadily on, as

though realizing that he must make a certain point within a given time.

Every now and then Nettie looked anxiously over her shoulder at the still gathering clouds, which seemed bent upon overtaking her. Occasionally she pulled up to allow Prince breathing space, and keep him up to the mark, but he appeared as anxious as his rider to get over the road, for it was with difficulty that she could get him to come to a standstill. Then she would pat him on the neck, and speak softly to him, "Good Prince; good horse, don't fret, don't shy or play pranks, for all depends upon you, old boy. It is hard on you, but think of the good missus, so sick at home, and perhaps you may be the means of saving her life." Prince pricked up his ears to listen to the soft voice for a moment, and then galloped on again.

All too soon daylight began to fade into the twilight which meant darkness within a few minutes, and, as the sky was becoming more and more overcast, she feared that she would be unable to see the road, and would have to leave things entirely to Prince's lead.

Osfontein was still half an hour away, and Nettie gave the horse a slight tap to urge him forward. It was the first he had received, and the unexpectedness of it made him almost shoot from under her so that she nearly lost her balance. With a snort he broke into a wild gallop, and sent the dust flying in clouds behind him. Nettie, not expecting that he would so spiritedly respond to the hint, was equally taken by surprise, and pulled in the reins

as hard as she could to bring him back to his usual easy canter. But Prince would have it his own way, and, taking the bit between his teeth, disregarded his rider's intentions, and kept the quick pace for fully ten minutes.

Nettie by no means objected to his mood, but feared that something or other might cause him to shy suddenly, as it was already quite dark, in which case she would be badly thrown, owing to the great speed at which he was travelling.

When at last he resumed his even canter Nettie noticed that his mouth was foaming, and that he was streaming with perspiration. Still, he refused to come to a standstill, in spite of all her tender persuasion.

Black darkness had settled on the veld, and she could only trust that the horse would keep to the road, which he instinctively and accurately did.

Every now and then she saw flashes of lightning in the distance, and faint rumblings of thunder reached her, but when suddenly a bright flash, near by, lit up her surroundings, followed by an unpleasantly loud report, she felt her heart in her mouth, as the saying is.

Prince behaved well, and kept his pace steadily, as she leaned forward to pat his neck, and speak encouragingly to him.

At last the lights of the farm burst into view as she turned a little kopje, and a few minutes later she drew rein, as the dogs vociferously announced her approach.

Japie Classens, the owner of the farm, warned

by the barking, came out of the house to ascertain the cause of the noise.

When he saw that his visitor was a Boer girl on horseback, he gave an exclamation of surprise, and shouted for his wife.

Mrs. Classens rushed out to welcome the new arrival, and immediately recognised Nettie, for flashes of vivid lightning were now following each other in quick succession.

She at once took the girl indoors, while Prince received careful attention from Japie Classens, who was a lover of good horses.

As yet not a drop of rain had fallen, and it was feared that the storm might prove a dry one, as is often the case.

Nettie secretly hoped that, just for the night, it might prove dry and pass over soon, so that she could resume her journey and carry out her project.

She was still explaining the nature of her mission when large drops of rain began to patter on the roof. These were followed by a heavy downpour, which seemed to literally flood the world.

"What a blessing you reached here in time," said Mrs. Classens, kindly.

"I have to thank my horse for that," Nettie answered; and she told of the sudden gallop, and the unbroken canter he had kept up for the rest of the way.

"Prince is one in a thousand," put in Classens. "I know the stock from which he springs. There is no horse hereabouts to match him, and I don't think there is more than one girl in the district either who has sufficient pluck to ride him—and at night, too!"

"You only say that to please me, Oom Japie," Nettie replied, laughing. "I can assure you I am a great coward. My heart sank into my boots, and it was only with difficulty that I could coax it back to its right place. Let us say that we don't know what any girl is capable of until she is put to the test."

Classens smiled at Nettie as he leaned forward to try and catch her words, which were lost in the clattering noise of the rain on the roof.

It was arranged that Classens should take the belated guest to town as soon as the storm passed over, but the rain continued to come down in such torrents that he began to fear the undertaking would be too hazardous, owing to the number of sloots and hollows traversing the road, which would soon be in flood and impassable.

"It is quite out of the question to go into town to-night," said Mrs. Classens. "It is pitch dark, and even if you did escape drowning or accident, you would never get old Dr. Hanau to stir out."

"That is true," agreed her husband. "I know him too well for that, and even if he were ever so willing, he would undoubtedly be stopped by the Brak River—the rain is sure to bring it down in full force."

The Brak River, although dry during the greater part of the year, became a serious barrier after each good rain on account of its large catchment area, and its current, which was strong enough to defy all attempts at crossing it. As no bridge spanned its banks there was nothing for the traveller to do save wait patiently until the water

subsided sufficiently to admit of the river being crossed—sometimes this meant a delay of two or three days.

The Brak River, like so many other rivers of its kind, is correctly speaking no river at all, but just a deep continuous gorge for carrying off rain water to the sea.

These rivers, or sloods, have become a veritable curse to South Africa. Collecting the precious rains from far and near into one channel, they drain the country of its very life-blood. Where, ten years ago, there were large grass-covered valleys studded with limpid pools of water, and bordered by tall-growing rushes and green bush, alive with water fowl, the eye now rests upon barren stretches riddled with furrows and sloods, all acting as so many tributaries to the great, gaping rent a little farther on; and where, formerly, clear fountains delighted all creatures of the wilderness with their refreshing tinkle and song, the solemn windmill stands to-day, waiting upon the fitful gusts of the scorching wind, ere it can bring to the surface the ever-sinking water.

With the consequent disappearance of bush and grass, the rainfall became less and less, and now drought like a skeleton stalks abroad, bringing in its train disease and pestilence amongst animals, and denuding the valley and hillside of every vestige of life.

Unless some public movement is set afoot throughout the whole length and breadth of United South Africa to combat this growing evil, the time will come when the Government will have to take the matter into very serious consideration, and spend

millions of pounds in the conservation of rain-water, and closing up sloods and furrows, whose numbers are steadily multiplying year by year. If not, the prophecy made some years ago, that the Karroo will, in course of time, become a barren desert, will unquestionably be fulfilled.

Mrs. Classens bustled about to prepare a meal for her guest, who had arrived some time after the usual supper-hour, and soon Nettie, who could not disguise the fact that she was very hungry, found herself seated before an appetising dish of ham and eggs and a steaming cup of coffee.

Some large, thick slices of home-made bread spread over with a thick layer of fresh butter completed the simple yet delicious spread.

Mrs. Classens served coffee to her husband and herself, and, although they had already had their supper, each took a slice of bread, in order to put Nettie at her ease, and encourage her to make a good meal.

The genuine hospitality of the South African Boer has so often formed the theme of writers that no further comment need be made on it.

The rain was still falling continuously, and Nettie began to fear that she would have to abandon the idea of reaching town that night. Anxiety for Tante Let urged her on, and gave her courage to brave all dangers, but she felt the truth of her host's statement that the Brak River would prove impassable.

It was fully half an hour before the rain stopped, and Nettie and Classens went out to ascertain their chances of getting to town.

The clouds had disappeared, but from all directions

came the warning sound of rushing waters, so, reluctantly, Nettie had to bow to the inevitable. She was very tired, indeed, after her long ride, and was glad when her hostess suggested retiring for the night.

She soon fell into a sound, dreamless sleep, and when early the next morning Mrs. Classens woke her with a cup of coffee, it appeared to her that she had but just fallen asleep. Still, she felt refreshed, and within a few minutes was up and about, and ready to resume her journey.

It was long before sunrise, but sufficiently light to see the road clearly.

As soon as she came from her room, Classens fetched his horses from the stable to inspan his buggy. Nettie immediately protested, saying that she could now go alone, as it was daylight, and the distance only an hour and a half.

"Nonsense, child. I may as well go with you, as I have no pressing work on hand, and it will give Prince a thorough rest. Besides, it is so wet and muddy, that you would soon get bespattered from head to foot."

"Oh! I don't mind the mud in the least," she said, smiling in her usual bright way, "but for the sake of Prince I will accept your kind offer."

"It is not so much Prince that he is thinking of," chimed in Mrs. Classens. "He does not very often get the opportunity of driving young ladies about."

Japie Classens pretended to pick up a stone to throw at his wife, as she dived behind Nettie to escape.

"Well, at all events, we won't elope further than

the town, and I may tire of him in time to bring him back here by midday," laughed Nettie.

Soon the buggy was inspanned and ready to start, but Mrs. Classens insisted upon Nettie having another cup of coffee, and had a parcel of sandwiches ready for their refreshment on the journey.

The morning air was keen and invigorating, and the buggy sped along smoothly over the wet and muddy road. Everywhere there were signs of the heavy rainfall during the night. All the sloots and hollows were washed clean, as the water rushed along the lower levels towards the town; and when, an hour later, the buggy came to the top of a rise from whence the approaches to the town could be seen, Classens gave an exclamation of surprise.

"Almachte! Look there!" pointing towards the outskirts of the dorp. "Where does all that water come from?"

Nettie looked, and saw that the valley before them was almost completely submerged, and had the appearance of a shallow lake. From where they pulled up the town itself could not be seen, as the low, drab hills intercepted their view. The only approach to the Karroo dorp was through a narrow basin or poort, and the poort, being the lowest point of a huge hollow many square miles in extent, formed the natural outlet of all flood water, and conveyed a strong flow when not a drop of rain had fallen within several miles of it.

"There must have been very heavy rains higher up during the night," remarked Nettie.

"It looks more like a cloud-burst—the water seems to come in such a solid mass."

“Fortunately we can reach the town without having to cross the water, so we shall soon see.”

The road from Osfontein skirted the foot of one of the hills enfiling the poort, and was much higher than the bed of the water-course at the point where it cut through the gorge.

The buggy stood for a moment outlined against the brown of the landscape, and presently moved on again. Everything looked peaceful. A curious blue haze enveloped the hills, merging with the bluer sky ; the Karroo birds flickered in and out the grass ; and high overhead a kite sailed in majestic sweeping circles—there was no hint of the death and desolation that lay beyond.

The storm of the previous night had not left Victoria West unscathed. The memory of it lives still in the minds of some of the older inhabitants, and, lest they forget, the weather-worn inscriptions on the old tombstones in the little churchyard serve to remind them.

The day of the great storm had been hot and sultry, and the intense heat deprived every one of all inclination to move. In store and office alike, no spirit of animation prevailed, and, but for an occasional transport waggon creaking through the town, the streets were completely deserted. It was not until the sun went down that signs of returning life and activity were manifested. The nearer the sun approached the horizon the cooler grew the air, until as twilight fell, the breeze blew cold and refreshing.

In the Karroo, no matter how hot and depressing the day may be, the evenings are always pleasant.

Tukie was standing in front of his shop, surveying a number of bales of wool and skins that he had bought during the day, making abstruse mental calculations as to their real value, when Andries Witte turned up on his return from his father-in-law's funeral.

He greeted the little Jew with a scowl and an off-hand grunt, as if he were dissatisfied with himself and the world in general ; but Tukie paid no attention to his customer's moods, and came forward in his usual effusive way.

" Good-evening, Mr. Witte. You are back early. You must have driven very fast."

" I am in a hurry to get home. It is going to rain hard to-night, but I must give my team a rest. See to them."

Tukie immediately took charge of the cart and horses, whilst Witte slouched off to his room, where he took a bottle of brandy from his bag and helped himself very freely. Then he flung himself upon the stretcher, muttering thickly to himself :

" How they eyed me when the codicil was read . . . beasts . . . fools. No one ever laughs at Andries Witte and goes unpunished . . . that old idiot Koos Hough . . . and they will all talk and laugh at me . . . that's right, laugh, laugh . . . I'm laughing now . . . More brandy, more brandy ! "

Pouring himself out half a tumbler full he tossed it off without so much as gasping, and then lay down again, more brain-muddled than ever.

" I shall laugh when they can't find it, and they can't . . . that's a sure thing . . . thought

they were dealing with a fool, did they? . . . could do Andries Witte out of his share . . . let them find the codicil now . . . old Robart is clever, but he can't read ashes. . . ."

His rambling speech ended in an incoherent drawl, but he did not fall asleep. Some disturbing thought kept him rolling from side to side, until at last he sat up and reached out for the brandy bottle. It was perfectly dark in the room, and his groping, shaky hand could not light on what he sought for so tremulously. He stretched out further, and lost his balance. Unable to recover himself he fell off the stretcher-bed—into water.

The unexpected immersion had a momentary sobering effect, and, cursing loudly, Witte jumped to his feet, trying to collect his scattered senses. Where was he, and why was there water in his room? He felt for the matches, but they would not ignite. He was standing ankle-deep in cold water that was slowly rising—he felt it creeping up his legs inch by inch. Staggering on a few steps he tried to step clear, but the whole floor was submerged.

"Tukie! Tukie!" the frightened Witte shouted, as he cursed the little Jew for his negligence in permitting water to flow into the room like this. "Tukie! Tukie!"

Receiving no answer he tried to find the door, for the water was over his knees now, and he realised dimly that he stood in some danger.

"If I can find that accursed Jew, I'll wring his neck!"

He touched the wall of the room, and, sliding along it, reached the door. As he turned the handle a

great force of water from outside pressed the door open with a rush, and Witte had only time enough to fling himself out of the inflow ere the whole room was deeply flooded.

Half-swimming, half-struggling, he got out of the rushing current. There was water everywhere ! Holding on to the wall of the house he waded to the corner of the building.

The sweeping torrent was in possession of everything, playing ducks and drakes with Tukie's valued bales of wool, which floated hither and thither on the face of the waters, and swirling into corners after derelict chairs.

Witte was now sober enough to understand the full extent of the horror facing him. He dared not leave the wall, and nobody was in sight. He must remain where he was, clinging on to the fragile projection which was his saviour, until the flood subsided.

One of the larger bales, propelled swiftly along by the eddying water, caught Witte in the back, causing him to lose his hold. Into the maelstrom midstream the swift rush carried him, turning his helpless body over and over.

One by one the remaining bales of wool eddied into the current, bobbing up and down like a school of porpoises at play. Every movable household article within reach of the water was animated with an irresistible desire to go a-navigating, and the main stream presented the appearance of a second-hand dealer's shop let loose in a medley of confusion.

An old waggon, long since discarded as unfit for the road, rolled by in drunken effort to keep itself

upright ; a little go-cart, released from work-a-day responsibilities, executed somersaults in the doorway of the Post Office ; a quantity of heavy boards, flotsam of some timber yard, swept the stream of a whole host of small, nondescript articles floating in a mass. Large pieces of furniture, each displaying a mode of 'omotion peculiar to its weight and shape, hustled each other, and gyrated madly round a whirlpool formed by two contrary currents at a crossroad.

Victoria West was in flood. The river, formed by the water passing through the poort from time to time, had proved too small to hold the sudden and tremendous force poured into it from the extensive watershed, and the overflow sought its level in the town. As no rain whatever had fallen in the dorp, the inhabitants were taken by surprise. No alarm was possible—death came swiftly to all alike.

The first thought of every one was the salving of such property as each deemed most valuable, but very soon work of a far more important nature thrust itself on the attention. From the houses nearest the river escape was well-nigh impossible, and from these came piteous cries for help.

Part of the town was built against the foot of a low hill, and its upper portions were safe from the engulfing water. Thither men, women and children had rushed for safety, crowding the roofs of the houses, as they watched the fearful scene.

Splashing through the water the frantic people tried for safe footholds above the flood line. And from every side came the piteous, never-ending scream as house after house was submerged.

On improvised rafts, on chairs lashed together, and deeply sunk tables, the rescue parties worked through the night, creeping up to the menaced houses and taking out the inmates one by one. Some, frantic with terror, made it difficult for their rescuers to save them ; others waited their turn silently, with a prayer on their lips. One old crone, bent with age and rheumatism, regardless of her own personal safety, and deaf to the cries around her, clung to a cash-box throughout, evidently considering further existence without it useless.

Now and again came the rumble of falling walls as ill-built houses gave way under the volume of pouring water. All was destruction, desolation, death.

Towards daybreak the water subsided as suddenly as it had come, and by the time the sun rose every house could be entered and searched.

CHAPTER XVI

CROSSING THE SPRUIT

AS the water receded from the streets and houses many pitiful sights were disclosed. The full extent of the catastrophe only became apparent when the work of gathering the dead began.

The Library Hall, the only public building in the place, was converted into a mortuary, and echoed to the sobs and lamentations of many grief-stricken hearts as bearer party after bearer party entered to deposit the remains of some unfortunate victim of the great flood.

Numbers of pale-faced men and women, who had fruitlessly sought their missing relatives among the living, came to see if they were numbered with the dead. To some the superintendent of the police, with a silent shake of his head, conveyed the news that the lost one was not in his charge, when, with renewed hope, the weary searchers went out to wander afresh through every nook and corner of the wrecked town. To others, in answer to the eternal enquiry, the officer would give a monosyllabic "Yes," and, turning, lead the way to the darkened room behind.

Still the parties came on with their ghastly burdens, and inside the hall busy helpers arranged the

bodies in rows for identification, and removed soaked, muddy clothes, replacing them with suitable wrappings.

Among the dead was the body of a woman whose cottage, several miles above the poort, was the first to be swept away. The force of the onrush carried her and her two children right through the poort and laid them against the churchyard wall at the end of the town, as though bringing them to a resting-place. No marks or scratches of any kind were on the bodies, and how they escaped injury as they dashed through brushwood and over jagged rocks will never be known.

Others there were whose bodies were so cut and torn that identification was only possible by the shreds of clothes they wore. Saddest of all was the fate of a young man, who had taken a prominent part all through the night in rescuing others. Attracted by cries for help from a falling house, he waded into the water beyond his depth, and was pinned against the wall by the force of the current, until a tree trunk, swirling past, struck and crushed him against the wall, which gave way, burying him in the jammed mass of the wreckage.

Early in the morning all the available carts and waggons went down to the river bank to salve as much lost property as possible, and each one returned to the Library Hall with a body.

Gradually the big room became fuller and fuller, and when at last bodies ceased to be brought in and no more were reported missing, the tragic death-roll was totalled.

A gloom like the shadow of a great pall lay upon

the town. People in the streets spoke in whispers, so overawed were they by the solemnity of the sorrow that had visited them. Business was entirely suspended, and everywhere undertakers hurried to and fro as they made arrangements for the funeral. Family groups, with bowed heads and tear-stained eyes, passed in and out of the hall of death.

Nettie had many friends among the dead and living, and would gladly have stayed on in Victoria West to render any service, but her first duty was to send off the doctor to the help of Tante Let, and she knew that her presence would be needed on the lonely farm. In the town there were so many workers—even the very old and the children found employment now.

Hurrying off to the doctor as soon as she arrived in the wrecked town, Nettie found that he was out tending the injured, and although she tried to way-lay him, she did not succeed in getting a talk with him until close on noon. He was very busy, and worked off his feet, having been up all night. He had done his full share in the work of rescue, and was besieged on all sides with anxious appeals for help. As he explained to the eager girl, there were many among the rescued who were ill at the time of the catastrophe, and who, in consequence of the soaking and exposure, were now in critical conditions. Numbers of people were down with nervous prostration, and others, half mad with grief, were in danger of losing their reason. And, of course, the minor injuries caused by blows received from débris carried down by the flood, were countless.

It was quite impossible for Dr. Hanau to leave the town and hurry off to so outlying a farm as Sterkfontein. And Nettie was bidden, as the doctor knew Tante Let very well indeed, to describe the patient's symptoms.

Being quite accustomed to this second-hand method of obtaining medical treatment the girl went into minute details, and was only pulled up by the doctor's assurance that there was nothing whatever to be alarmed at. Tante Let was merely run down and required complete rest. It was not necessary that a doctor should visit her at all, but as she was an old patient and a much-respected one, he would journey out to Sterkfontein as soon as ever the condition of things in Victoria West improved. At the moment, as he was the only physician for miles around, he could not leave his post.

Doctor Hanau mixed a bottle of medicine and handed it over to Nettie, and next instant was deep in conversation with a tragic-faced woman who had waited patiently for him to speak to her.

As soon as Nettie realised that she could not induce Doctor Hanau to accompany her to Sterkfontein her one idea was to get back to Classens, and start for the farm. Tante Let must have the medicine, at any rate.

She was hurrying down the street when some one overtook her from behind, and a hand was laid upon her shoulder.

"Thank God, you are safe!"

Nettie turned in surprise and found herself face to face with Wijnand, who grasped her hand and pressed it tenderly.

“ Good heavens, Wijnand ! What brought you here ? ”

“ What else but Nettie ? Your mother is half wild with anxiety, and I was deputed to hunt you out and bring you away from this sad town instantly.”

“ How silly you all are ! You knew I was here to fetch a doctor, and surely I am not such a baby that I cannot look after myself.”

“ No. But such a storm as you must have passed through was enough to strike terror to the bravest heart.”

“ I did not pass through it. Prince outstripped it, and only when I was safe under Japie Classens’ roof did it burst. Oh, Wijnand, is it not piteously sad here ? There are so many whom I could help, and yet I feel the necessity of hurrying back to dear Tante Let. How was she when you left ? ”

“ She fell asleep shortly before Gijs and I reached Sterkfontein this morning, and I am sure will be much better now.”

“ This morning ! How did you manage to get here so soon ? Was not the Brak River full ? ”

“ I got fresh horses along the road, and you may be sure I did not spare them. There was some water in the river, but not much, as the storm passed lower down.”

“ I am glad of that. I was afraid of being stopped on my way back.”

“ If Doctor Hanau is ready we can start.”

“ He cannot get away at all now,” said Nettie regretfully. “ But he gave me a bottle of medicine,

and we must take it at once. The sooner Tante Let has a dose of it the better."

The conversation then turned to the flood, and all that Nettie had seen and heard of the catastrophe. As they went along grim evidence of death met them on every side.

"I simply cannot stay in town any longer," cried Nettie. Her face was drawn with intense feeling, and her voice trembled. "I feel so unstrung that I fear I shall collapse if we remain here. Let us start, let us start at once!"

"I'm afraid the journey will be too much for you—coming on the top of all this!" replied Wijnand, tenderly. "Hadn't I better leave you at Osfontein, and ride on from there with the medicine?"

"No, no," she answered, more calmly. "Mother will be so very anxious. And once away from all this misery I shall be all right again."

"It will be late by the time we reach Sterkfontein. Do you mind?"

"Why should I? I should feel safe with you in the darkest night."

Her words were accompanied by a look full of confidence and trust, and the young man felt a thrill of delight as she spoke.

Without further delay Classens was hunted out, and was told how matters stood. He would gladly have gone back with them, but he had many relatives among the homeless and dead, and could not very well desert them in such an hour.

Soon Wijnand and Nettie were seated in the buggy, and, glad to turn their backs upon such a scene of desolation, they drove off at once.

Arrived at Osfontein, they found that the news of the calamity had preceded them, but Mrs. Classens still wanted further particulars, and would have detained the pair for the night had their reason for going on been of a less pressing nature. Prince was brought out of the stable, and mounted by a young native boy, named Umbwane, lent by Mrs. Classens, and within a few minutes of its arrival the buggy was again on its journey.

The road was wet and heavy, and travelling was difficult. Where but the day before Prince had kicked up a volume of dust behind him there was nothing but slush and mud.

Wijnand had left his own horses at Jan Cillier's farm and intended calling for them before recrossing the Brak River.

In the over-excited state of her nerves Nettie talked volubly on all topics, trying to force herself to forget the scene she had left behind, and Wijnand did what he could to keep things going. But after some time it seemed that every possible topic was exhausted, and both lapsed into silence.

The impression upon their youthful minds of such sorrow as they had witnessed was too deep to be easily dismissed, and they found their thoughts dwelling continually upon the disaster.

It was a relief when, towards sunset, they reached Cillier's farm to exchange horses and snatch a short rest.

Being off the main road the dreadful news had not yet reached this out-of-the-way spot, and Wijnand and Nettie had to relate the whole of the events over again, and answer numerous questions.

Cillier and his wife pressed them to stay for the night, warning them that the river had swollen considerably during the day and that it was dangerous to cross it. But Nettie, knowing the state of anxiety in which her mother would be, decided to push forward and risk the consequences.

"She will know that the river is full, and most difficult to cross," urged Cillier, persuasively.

"Yes, but having heard of the flood in town, and not knowing that I slept at Osfontein, she may conclude that I am drowned."

"Nonsense! As soon as the news reached her she would be told that you are all right."

"Well, anyhow, I have also to think of Tante Let," said Nettie decisively, "and even if mother is not in any trouble about me, I ought to hurry on with the medicine."

Mrs. Cillier, who noticed Nettie's overstrung condition, felt genuinely concerned, and begged the girl to remain.

"I am sure," she said kindly, "your mother would be glad to know that you are safe with us for the night. Let Wijnand ride Prince home, and take the medicine. He can give them all news of you and you can go on at your leisure to-morrow."

For a moment Nettie wavered, but she felt too uneasy to settle down, and longed to be with her mother.

"You are very good, Mrs. Cillier, but now that I am on the road I would like to get the journey over. Of course if we find the river quite impassable, we shall have to return and accept your hospitality."

Wijnand had exchanged the horses, and was

ready to start, and in less than twenty minutes from the time of their arrival they were moving on again.

"Now that I have my own horses, I can drive faster. We ought to be home in two hours' time."

"I am glad," replied Nettie, "but please do not overtax them. An hour more or less will not matter, will it? It was only that I could not bear the idea of stopping half-way."

"I was thankful that you decided not to stay," said Wijnand, looking at her tenderly. "The road would have been very lonely without you."

"I've been poor company so far, but I do not feel myself at all. Forgive me."

Wijnand protested that to him she was the sweetest company in the world. He was fast drifting on to forbidden ground, and could hardly prevent himself from dropping the reins and taking the tired girl in his arms. She was weary and ill—he longed to comfort her. And just then the bank of the river loomed before them.

The Brak had certainly a great deal of water in it, but Wijnand, who knew every inch of it, saw no difficulty in crossing. He judged that, at the ford, the water would not reach above the horses' girths, and Nettie kept on reiterating her desire to get to the other side.

With Boer-like carefulness Wijnand ordered the native to cross first on Prince, so that they might see exactly the depth and strength of the current. The horse walked in boldly as though the current was of no consequence at all. At no time was the water, even at the deepest part, above his girth,

As he scrambled up the opposite bank Wijnand, reassured, prepared to follow. Putting the horses to the stream he drove them carefully, guiding them over the ford with a strong hand.

The buggy was in mid-stream when the near horse stumbled over a stone and plunged forward in terror. Unable to regain his balance he fell on his side, and, breaking the dissel-boom, disappeared in the fast-running stream. The next moment Wijnand and Nettie were struggling in the water. The falling of the horse, the smashing of the shaft, and the struggles of the drowning animal had overturned the buggy. Both horses were now kicking out and plunging in their efforts to free themselves from the hampering harness, and to keep their heads above water.

It all happened in a moment, and so unexpectedly that Wijnand was unable to grip hold of Nettie, though he endeavoured to do so. As the buggy turned over he was thrown, still holding the reins, right on to the frightened horses. Nettie fell clear of the buggy, but, managing to grasp the hood, she was able to prevent herself from being washed away, and succeeded in climbing up on the side of the oscillating buggy. Wijnand was between the horses now, and in great danger of being kicked by their hoofs as they lashed out in every direction. The dashboard was splintered and broken as the off horse broke his traces and regained his footing.

Nettie called at the top of her voice to Umbwane to come to the rescue, and the boy, who had seen what had happened, was already urging Prince towards them as fast as he could.

"Get to their heads and steady them!" shouted Wijnand, who was standing between the horses, unable to get clear of them whilst they struggled so violently.

Catching at their heads Umbwane was able to quieten them, and Wijnand, with slow difficult movements, clambered on to the buggy.

"Are you hurt, Nettie?" he asked, wiping the water from his face.

His first thought was of her. The girl noticed that, as she replied cheerfully: "No, I am all right. Are you?"

"That brute 'Aasvogel' kicked me in the side, but it is nothing. You must get to the bank."

Nettie nodded, and was climbing over the wheel of the buggy nearest to her when the force of the current, catching her skirts, pinned her against the axle.

What was to be done! She could not wade with the weight of the water in her skirts, and needing both hands to grip the wheel, was unable to throw off her impeding garments. Wijnand tried to lift her on to Prince's back, as he stood alongside, but it was useless. She slipped back every time.

At last Umbwane had a happy thought. Backing Prince close up, he told the bewildered girl to hang on to the horse's tail.

"If the Baas will take the horse's head and lead him slowly I will hold up the Klein's dress so that she may walk out."

Wijnand saw the wisdom of the suggestion, and at once acted upon it. Nettie clung to Prince's tail as well as she could, laughing hysterically the

while. The native, bending down, caught her wet skirts, and with Prince dragging her slowly step by step the bedraggled girl reached the bank in safety.

Thoroughly exhausted and overburdened, she sank down on the margin of the rushing stream, whilst the two men turned back to right the buggy and bring it out. The horses, as though knowing what was wanted of them, stood perfectly still.

Wijnand, rummaging under the seat, brought out a rope, just as Umbwane freed the near horse, "Aasvogel." Attaching it to the body of the buggy, and "Aasvogel's" trace to the wheel, the two men with some difficulty righted the light trap and succeeded in bringing it to land. Wijnand at once commenced to make a temporary trace of the rope and cleared away the broken dissel-boom, afterwards patching up the harness of the two horses.

The picture they all presented sent Nettie into fits of laughter, but on Wijnand's face there was no responsive smile. He blamed himself for the accident, although the girl tried her best to convince him that no human being could possibly have foreseen it.

The problem of dry clothes presented itself. They were all wet through to the skin, and there was not homestead near.

Wijnand did not care about himself in the least, but could not bear to think of Nettie's plight. But to drive back to Cillier's meant crossing the river once more.

"Go straight on to Sterkfontein," said Nettie.

"If you don't mind waiting here, I will send the

boy back to Osfontein on Prince—he could be back within the hour. I am sure Mrs. Cillier would gladly lend you some dry clothes.”

“What is the use of sending for clothes that can only arrive in an hour’s time? We could be nearly home by then, and, besides, Mrs. Cillier is more than twice my size. Imagine me in her spacious gown and with her huge cappie on. Even the horses would laugh! No, if you are ready, let us start at once.”

She held out her wet skirts, and strutted about for a few paces in imitation of Mrs. Cillier’s pompous walk, and Wijnand, in spite of his distress, had to laugh at her.

“And you, of course, would dress up in Mr. Cillier’s garments!” Nettie shrieked with merriment. “You are feet taller, and wouldn’t be able to button things at all. Your trousers would look as if they had a quarrel with your boots, and your coat would strain across the back until the seam gave way. It is too funny!” She laughed so much that she could not complete the picture. Umbwane, too, who had remounted Prince, joined in her merriment, although he was beginning to feel the cold considerably.

Wijnand helped Nettie to wring the water from her clothes, and assisted her into the cart, promising to drive as fast as the horse could travel. It was almost dark, but that did not trouble him. He knew every stone on the road, and understood his team thoroughly. By a superhuman effort he climbed to his seat, and as he took the reins an involuntary groan escaped his lips.

In a frightened little voice Nettie asked her companion whether he felt much pain, having for the last few minutes forgotten that he had received a bad kick.

"My side hurts dreadfully," he said, speaking slowly as though he disliked referring to the disaster. "I am afraid I've broken a rib or two."

Nettie's face changed, and her anxiety and sympathy vibrated in her words: "Let me drive, Wijnand, and you can lean against me. It will be easier for you."

"No, no," he answered firmly. "I will drive."

It was quite clear that the plucky young Boer had considerable difficulty in sticking to his task. His right arm was practically useless, and every jolt caused him agony. Seeing this, Nettie reached over and took the whip. Wijnand smiled at her as he tried to show no signs of the acute pain he was feeling.

The horses were stepping out and covered mile after mile at a quick, regular trot. Prince, at full canter, followed the buggy. It was not a typically cold evening, but the motion created a great draught which soon turned the wet clothes to a condition of icy unpleasantness. Nettie began to shiver violently, and Wijnand, with some difficulty, pulled off his coat and hung it over her in an attempt to ward off the keen wind. She refused to deprive him of it, but he was firm and made her keep it.

Umbwane had stripped to the waist and was much more comfortable, and were it not for the presence of Nettie Wijnand would have done the

same. As it was, he drove all the faster to reach his journey's end, and as he predicted, did the distance in less than two hours.

Hardly a word passed between them towards the last, and it was only when nearing the home-stead that Wijnand asked the girl how she felt.

"Thankful to be nearly home," was her spiritless reply. "You had better take your coat again. I shall never forgive myself for taking it from you."

"What nonsense! I forced it upon you, and haven't felt the want of it at all. Don't take it off until we stop."

"And you, Wijnand? Is your side very bad? I am so sorry about it."

"It is painful," he said, drawing his breath in curious little gasps. "I am getting so stiff, too. I find it difficult to move."

Exposed to the continual draught their outer garments had become quite dry, and but for the mud upon them, no one would have guessed that they had had a ducking in the river.

As usual the dogs heralded the approach of the travellers, and as they pulled up quite a little group stood on the stoep to welcome them, amongst them Tante Let—Tante Let, looking almost herself again!

Wijnand wanted to jump down, but found that he was almost unable to move. He had to be helped out by Gijs. Nettie, also, was so cramped and stiff with cold that she had considerable difficulty in climbing from the buggy to the ground.

Wijnand, leaning heavily on Gijs, collapsed into a chair. He had fainted after the strain he had met so bravely.

In a moment Tante Let was all action, and ordering Gijs to carry Wijnand to bed, she soon had the young man stripped of the mud-stained clothes which had become such a burden and pain. Examining the terrible bruise, which was already swollen and black, she at once prescribed fomentations.

Wijnand revived under the movement of being undressed, and told Gijs and Du Plessis all about the accident. Tante Let commenced operations and presently had the young man warmly wrapped up. Hot coffee and a special brew of the old lady's was brought to him, and her kindly eyes saw to it that it was finished off to the last drop.

The news of the calamity in town had reached Sterkfontein but sketchily, and Nettie had to go over every detail once more. In recounting all that had happened she worked herself and her hearers into such a state of excitement that both she and her listeners forgot her drenched state altogether. It was only after all was told that her mother remembered, and took the girl to change her things. The tension of meeting her own people and recounting the great events, and the reviving cup of coffee handed to her by the thoughtful Tante Let, restored Nettie to an almost normal condition. Like all Boer girls she was used to an outdoor life, and inured to extremes of heat and cold. Beyond a temporary stiffness of the limbs she soon felt no discomfort.

Tante Let had got up about noon that day, feeling rested and recovered.

After Nettie had rested awhile, Du Plessis spoke of returning home, but Tante Let immediately

vetoed the idea, saying that she would not hear of it. Her experienced eye had noticed that the girl was completely worn out, and she feared that any further demands on her strength might have serious results.

"Leave Nettie with me for a few days," said Tante Let, in the tone of one who does not mean to take a refusal. "I'll see that she has a thorough rest."

Du Plessis, with a view to future possibilities, never objected to Nettie visiting Tante Let, and remaining as long as she desired. He conceded the point, therefore, very warmly, and presently took his departure, carrying his reluctant wife with him.

As soon as they had gone Nettie was ordered off to bed, and given a dose from Tante Let's "Huis Apotheek." The dose must have contained some very strong ingredients, for although Nettie declared that she knew the events of the day would keep her from sleep, she very soon fell off into a deep sleep, from which she did not waken until the sun was up.

Tante Let shared the room with Nettie, and every now and then throughout the night she got up and went to her son's bedroom to see if Gijs was looking after the patient properly.

Wijnand lay in a state of great exhaustion. His temperature had risen considerably, and was now dangerously high. Gijs and his mother became more and more concerned as the sick man moved painfully and occasionally rambled in his speech.

The following morning Wijnand was suffering

excruciating agony, and the dry flush in his cheeks and the hot feeling of his skin were sure signs to the experienced Tante Let that he was in a high fever, and required constant attention.

The fatigue of the experiences before he had met with Nettie, and the accident in the river, followed by the trying drive in soaked clothes, had told upon Wijnand's constitution, never of the really robust type. Nature was struggling hard to meet the heavy demands on her resources, but, try as he would, the young man could not rally from the shock. The worst feature of his case was the injury to his ribs. So tender was it that anything but the most cursory examination was out of the question. It was evident that something was broken, for Wijnand experienced much difficulty in breathing, and had commenced coughing. Occasionally, too, he spat blood, a sure sign of internal injury. At this Tante Let became seriously alarmed, and sent Jantje post-haste to Boshoeck to summon the Brandts.

It was then very early, and it was to be expected that the anxious parents would come at once. To Tante Let's surprise they did not arrive. Quarter of an hour slipped by quarter of an hour—and still no sign of the expected buggy! Gijs wanted to fire his gun,—a well-known summons, but his mother feared that the report would rouse Wijnand, and throw him into a still higher state of fever.

At last some carts were sighted on the horizon, and as they came nearer Gijs noticed a number of men surrounding the caravan. He drew his mother's attention to this, and together they puzzled over its meaning. There was no sale or funeral in the

neighbourhood. What could be the cause of such a gathering ?

The two Cape carts were undoubtedly those of Brandt and Du Plessis, and some of the horses under saddle Gijs recognised, but the other riders and horses were unknown to him.

When the little cavalcade drew near Gijs noticed that many of the men wore police uniforms, and he wondered more than ever. Something of a serious nature must be afoot.

The riders drew rein, and quick as lightning Brandt jumped out of his cart. Going to Gijs he whispered something in his ear.

"Are you Gijsbert Uijs of Sterkfontein ?" inquired the Chief of Police.

"I am," answered Gijs, quietly.

"Then I arrest you in the name of Her Majesty the Queen for the murder of Piet Platje, Klaas Windogel, Banja Lakik, Stuurman Bokoor and others. And I warn you that you need not say anything, and that whatever you do say will be used in evidence against you." Gijs stared at him, too astonished to reply.

"Is Wijnand Brandt, of Boshoeck, here ?"

"Yes, but he is very ill in bed," Tante Let, intervening, spoke sharply.

"I am sorry, but I have to arrest him also."

A chorus of exclamations went up at once from Tante Let and Nettie, and the former exclaimed excitedly : "You cannot arrest him ! You cannot ! He is dangerously ill, having been badly kicked in an accident with his buggy. He is delirious."

As she spoke the sick man could be heard quite

plainly talking to himself and mythical people around his bed. Turning quickly, the old lady left the stoep and hurried in to attend to her patient. The police-officer fell back a pace with a puzzled expression on his usually imperturbable face, and, after consulting with a subordinate, said : " I have to do my duty. I must see Wijnand Brandt, and go through the formality of arrest, and as the charge is a capital one I shall be obliged to leave a guard here."

Gijs, interposing, remarked dryly : " He cannot be moved. You can satisfy yourself."

Going towards the door indicated by a wave of the hand the police-officer entered the house and carried out his task. Returning he asked Gijs if any one had been sent to fetch a doctor, for it was indispensable that a medical certificate should be obtained.

" We expect Doctor Hanau any moment," said Nettie. " He promised to come as soon as ever his duties in town allowed him to get away."

Turning to Brandt, Gijs, who had been too astonished to say much, exclaimed : " What does it all mean ? "

" Some one has informed against us ! " said Brandt bitterly. " If I only had the swine here now ! Our humane Government allow the Bushmen to murder us with impunity, but when we defend ourselves against the vermin we are arraigned for murder ! "

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAW MOVES

THE mournful aspect that the little town of Victoria West presented for days after the flood still survives in the memories of the inhabitants, and will do so for many a year to come.

All shops, stores, and other business-houses were closed ; work of every nature was entirely neglected, even that of such vital importance as trying to repair the damage wrought by the water.

Numbers of people were still coming in from the country. Some had lost relatives and friends ; others had near and dear ones living in town, who seemed doubly valuable by reason of their miraculous escape from death.

Since the morning of the flood the news had been sent to all the neighbouring towns, and almost every minister in the vicinity of each out-dorp desired to take part in the funeral service.

The Kerkraad, hastily summoned for the purpose, deliberated upon the best method of conducting the interment of so large a number of bodies in one day. It was decided by the august body to hold one service only, and to bury as many of the victims as was possible in one grave. If, of course, there were

representatives of any of the drowned who wished for separate burials, the Kerkraad undertook to help further the arrangements, and provide a suitable minister.

At ten o'clock one sunny morning the little church was crowded to suffocation with a grief-stricken congregation listening to the impressive utterances of three pastors, who each spoke, in turn, words of comfort and consolation.

After the service, a long procession, headed by ox-waggons doing duty as hearses, marched slowly to the churchyard, followed by the simply-clad Boer citizens and their families.

The rough, hastily-made coffins were reverently removed, and placed in rows at the open graveside.

The work of lowering these into the earth occupied some considerable time, and the tearful onlookers stood patiently awaiting the committal.

When the last coffin was lowered, one of the ministers, an old man with a patriarchal white beard, mounted the heaped-up ground by the side of the grave, and in a voice shaken by emotion, asked the audience to sing a verse from the funeral hymn :

“ Vrome, vroeg gestorven vrienden !
Slechts zijt gy mij wat vooruit,
'K zal u allen wedervinden,
Als ons Jezuz 't graf outsluit ;
'Eerlang zal ik met u rusten,
'K rijp al vast voor d'eeuwigheid,
'K Staar vast op die blyde kusten,
Daar my 't hoogst geluk verbeidt.”

The old sexton, in quavering voice, commenced the hymn, and some hundreds of voices joined in, all singing more or less in subdued tones.

Magnificent and appropriate as the words are, to appreciate the hymn fully it should be heard from a distance when sung in the open by a large number of people.

The deep tones flooded the air in volumes of glorious sound, and rose and fell in waves of harmony, like the vibrating roll of a great organ.

Nothing stirs the simple, unimaginative Boer to such an ecstasy of emotion as the singing of this indescribably affecting funeral hymn.

When all was over the pastor dismissed the people with a benediction, and the mourners quietly and reverently departed, leaving their dead in their last long sleep.

Now that the funeral was over the town quickly assumed a livelier aspect. By the late afternoon shop doors were thrown open to receive customers; carpenters and masons were busily repairing damaged buildings in an endeavour to prevent total collapse, and the streets were alive with people.

During the time the stores were closed, Tukie, with an eye to the main chance, had worked hard to clear the mud from his shop, and had carefully cleaned all such goods as were not rendered utterly valueless by the water. As soon as business commenced once more he hung above his door a large board, upon which he had painted in uneven letters the words: "Sale of damaged goods at desperate reductions," and while the other storekeepers were still engaged in clearing away the mud and débris, Tukie was selling out as fast as his staff could work at what he called "rock-bottom prices."

Whether it was the new signboard over the door,

or the bargain-hunting fever, that attracted the crowd, his rivals could not say, but certain it was that Tukie's shop became more and more congested every minute.

Each would-be purchaser wanted damaged goods only, and when the astute Jew found that his stock was in imminent danger of running out, he kept up the supply by immersing untouched bales, and every sort and kind of useful commodity, in a tub of muddy water artfully concealed in an adjoining room.

The demand was great, but the adroit Tukie kept pace with it, and no matter what was required, it was forthcoming.

As usual, the little Jew himself was not serving. He roamed in and out of the crowd, wringing his hands and bemoaning his fate, declaring that he was completely ruined, all the while keeping a sharp look-out to see that customers did not pilfer anything in the crush and confusion.

When at last the other storekeepers made ready to offer damaged goods at reduced prices Tukie was sold clean out, and everybody had purchased all they wanted, and a great deal more.

Tukie continued, as ever, to puzzle his rivals and the general public. When he arrived in Victoria West, six years previously, he had nothing, and made a living by wandering from farm to farm peddling knick-knacks and oddments to please farmers' wives and children. Now he was prosperous, and had the largest and busiest store in town.

He sold cheaper than any one else, and yet paid higher prices for wool and produce. How did he

do it? His bankruptcy was predicted again and again by all who knew the secrets of the trade, but without realization as yet. His establishment grew and grew; he gave credit for twelve months and more. What was the reason of Tukie's popularity? Nobody could guess.

The Boer is supposed to be wily and cute, and has gained for himself the epithet of "slim," but compared with the cunning Jew he is a mere child. The Boer has inherited from his Huguenot and old Dutch voortrekker forbears a trait of character which means, if we could translate it, "Trust me and I will trust you." The Jew, not slow to read the signs, takes all advantage, to the ultimate discomfort of the "slim" Boer, whose acumen is not directed to money matters outside farming affairs.

England, with true diplomatic foresight, has extended to the conquered Boer her full confidence and trust, and the time will come when she will have cause to congratulate herself upon the wisdom of her liberal policy, in spite of a few short-sighted politicians who try to sow dissension and disunion on the "All take and no give" principle.

Undoubtedly Tukie's sale was a success, if persuading a man to buy things he does not want counts. The more Tukie declared that he was absolutely giving things away, the more customers assisted him by carrying them off. And the little Jew gave three months' credit to all good customers.

He trusted the Boers and the Boers trusted him, and paid their accounts with wool and produce, after which wily Tukie gave them something to take with them which "might come in useful in

times of sickness," or trumpery articles as presents for their families.

The day after the funeral Tukie was still busily employed in cleaning the bales of wool and hides recovered from the river, when a man on horseback pulled up at the door. Dismounting, the rider threw the reins to a servant, and walked through the shop into the private office with an air of proprietorship.

Tukie, looking up, recognized his visitor at once, and throwing down his work he hurried to his office and bolted the door behind him.

"Good-morning, Herman," said the newcomer, familiarly.

"I am glad to see you, Jacob," responded the little Jew, shaking the proffered hand.

"I heard of the flood and have come to see how you fared."

"First-class, Jacob, first-class. What you think?" Tukie's face beamed with satisfaction. "To us the flood has been a stream of gold. I have sold out every scrap of our old stock as damaged goods, and could have sold more had there been more to sell."

"Well done, Herman. I knew you would be wide awake as you always are." Jacob rubbed his hands in satisfaction. The smile on his face broadened, and his keen grey eyes narrowed, whilst his large crooked nose seemed to become more prominent by contrast.

"Did you take much in cash?" queried Jacob.

"Only a few pounds from customers whom I did not dare to trust. As for the others——" Tukie's

hands went up, palms outwards, as if to ward off a calamity, "if they all paid cash at the prices I sold at we should lose heavily, but in twelve months' time things will be different. What you think?"

No one would ever have thought that Herman (otherwise Tukie) Tugendreich and Jacob Friedenthal were partners. The latter rarely appeared in the district, and nothing was known of him, not even his name. Occasionally, when some farmer had to pay up some heavy shop account, he opportunely came upon the scene and generously offered to provide the money on a mortgage bond, which would never be called in so long as the interest was paid.

He always declared that he had no money of his own to invest, but for a nominal commission of five per cent. he was usually able to raise a loan from the firm of Moses and Company, who were his staunch friends. He did not, of course, think it necessary to mention the fact that Moses and Company were in reality Tugendreich and Friedenthal.

"And so Andries Witte is drowned?" said Jacob.

"Yes, poor fellow. I don't know however he got out of his room. A short time before the flood came I had peeped in and saw him lying on the bed. I thought he was asleep. Later, when I sent some boys to rescue him, he was gone. What you think?"

"I think it is good riddance, Herman. He was getting very troublesome, and had even threatened to shoot me. Moses and Company were just about to call in their bond, and that would have caused a ruction. Now his estate must be settled in the

usual way and nobody can dispute accounts. His death is our gain, and the best way out of it for us."

"You are right, Jacob. I believe he was cleared out of every penny, and the stock he has left will just about cover his shop bill. What you think? There is no knowing what trouble a man of his nature may give when face to face with bankruptcy. Before he went out to his father-in-law's funeral, I saw him in the company of the chief constable, and while he was away I saw his servant Oukop in town, and the chief constable had an interview with him. What you think?"

A guilty conscience pricks. When Jacob heard the police mentioned he gave a nervous start and turned quite pale. He related to Tukie the substance of his last interview with Witte, and how he had thoughtlessly threatened him with the law. It was Tukie's turn to become uneasy, and when Jacob had told him everything he could find nothing to say beyond his tiresome exclamation, "What you think?"

"We have to be very careful, Herman, and the sooner I move on the better."

A few minutes later the two returned to the shop, and at once assumed their rôle of strangers. Jacob affected to be searching the shop for some article he needed, and Tukie dusted the bales of wool vigorously.

Suddenly the chief constable walked into the store, followed by Oukop. As soon as the latter caught sight of Friedenthal he pointed to him excitedly, crying: "That's the man, Baas! That's the man!"

The police officer walked up to Jacob and said sharply : " What is your name ? "

Friedenthal gave Oukop a venomous glance as he answered : " Why do you want to know ? "

" My reasons are good ones," said the constable, smiling a little. " If you will come with me to my office I shall be able to satisfy you on the point."

His calm decisive manner convinced Friedenthal that dallying would be suspicious, and as there were many people in the store at the time, he thought discretion the better part of valour. Very quietly he intimated his willingness to follow.

" I will go with you, but first you must kindly allow me to settle for a few articles I have bought."

He beckoned Tukie to one side, and under pretence of handing over some money, transferred to the Jew a bundle of papers he brought out of his breast pocket, charging him, at the same time, to keep the documents under lock and key.

" Above all, Herman, deny all knowledge of me, either privately or in business. Then, if anything happens to me, the business can go on as usual."

The warning was timely, for Tukie, who was no actor, was getting tremendously excited, and his round eyes were dilated to their fullest extent with fright, and it was only with the greatest possible effort that he could assume any semblance of outward calm. Friedenthal, on the contrary, was as cool as the proverbial cucumber. By long practice he had gained complete mastery over his emotions.

Nodding stiffly to Tukie, Jacob joined the officer, who stood waiting on the door-step, and together they walked away. As soon as they quitted the

shop Tukie rushed distractedly into the yard. The dramatically sudden arrest of his partner was a thunderclap to him, and as he did not know the nature of the charge, he was in terrible suspense, fearing that he himself might be involved in some way.

The average Jew, since the days of Shylock, is supposed to be as parsimonious as he is covetous, but covetous as he is, he would far sooner part with a large sum of money than face the music of a trial by jury.

After waiting an agonized hour, vainly expecting his partner's return, Tukie could endure the suspense no longer, and decided to consult Mr. Robart, who might be able to give some legal advice on the case. He was anxious to find out whether anything was known of the arrest, so that he might the better judge whether any danger threatened him personally.

Mr. Robart was closeted with a number of people in his private office. For all that Tukie knocked impatiently, and, receiving no answer, kept on knocking until the door was opened.

The old lawyer came out with a frown on his face, closing the door after him. The frown, however, soon disappeared, for Mr. Robart was the kindest-hearted man alive, and nobody feared his anger in the least.

"What on earth are you hammering at my door for, Tukie? Can't you see that I'm engaged?" Mr. Robart's kindly eyes belied the severity of his tone. "Now, what is it?"

Tukie apologized confusedly for the disturbance,

and told the lawyer of the arrest of a customer in his store, and asked the particulars of the charge.

"How the deuce can I tell you? The police don't come and tell me all they have up their sleeves against criminals. In what way does it affect you?"

"It gives my shop a bad name to have people arrested there. What you think?"

"Rubbish! Your shop's name cannot be any worse than it is, so don't worry about that. Who and what is the man whom the police arrested?"

"I only know that his name is Friedenthal, and that he speculates," answered Tukie, guardedly.

"Oh, that Jew with the big nose! I am glad, Tukie, and I hope the police will take him and all the rest of the Jews in South Africa, and sentence them to another forty years' march in the wilderness." The old lawyer chuckled, and his eyes danced with fun. Tukie saw that Mr. Robart knew nothing whatever of the arrest, so took the banter in the same spirit as it was meant, and returned to his shop.

The arrest of a white man in a small country town always creates a certain amount of interest, and it was not very surprising to Mr. Robart that Tukie should question him about the matter. Pondering for a moment he stood where the little Jew had left him, and then walked back into the private office, leaving the door open. He did not take a seat, but strode up and down before his desk as he addressed a number of waiting clients.

"As I was saying when that Jew interrupted me, we may think what we like, but it is not always

politic to put our thoughts into words. It is a serious accusation against an heir to say that he destroyed a codicil unless very clear proof is forthcoming. Even if the heir be dead we must remember that he has legal descendants who will represent him in case of *ab intestato* administration. Fortunately we all know the contents of the late Koos Hough's will, and I can re-write it word for word, and I am sure that the Court will, on application, allow the dead man's wishes to be carried out."

Some of the heirs secretly rejoiced at the unexpected prospect of sharing equally with others in the distribution of the estate, and the lawyer's intention of applying for authority to administer the will in the terms of the lost codicil met with strong opposition, but as there were others who insisted upon the application being made, the opponents gradually and reluctantly gave in for fear of drawing suspicion upon themselves.

"We shall not have to wait long before the petition can be presented. I will have the papers ready for your signatures in about three days' time."

Mr. Robart intimated in a polite manner that the interview was at an end, and the gathering broke up. Just as the lawyer was shaking hands with the last of his clients, Tukie again unceremoniously broke into the office, almost beside himself with excitement.

"Please come at once to my yard. Brandt and some of the other farmers are there and want to see you. Come quickly!" Tukie stammered in his agitation, and waved his arms as he seized Mr.

Robart by the coat sleeve and pulled him towards the door.

"Let go, Tukie! I will come and see what is up."

The old lawyer shook himself free and Tukie backed hurriedly over the stoep. Mr. Robart laughed as he bade goodbye to Koos Hough's eldest daughter: "If Tukie forgets to use his favourite catchword 'What you think?' it must be serious. Eh! What you think?"

Taking up his hat the kindly lawyer prepared to follow Tukie, who was not in sight, and a genuine surprise awaited him. Two police officers, fully armed, guarded the door leading to the yard.

"Hallo, what have we here! Has our Jewish friend been up to some pranks?"

"No," replied the officer, grinning broadly, "but he is in such a state of mind that one might almost connect him with the matter in hand. There are some men in there who wish to see you, sir." He pointed to a room at the door of which another policeman was standing.

Mr. Robart passed in and found himself in the presence of Brandt, Gijs, Du Plessis, Venter, and two or three other young farmers.

Brandt, as usual, acted as spokesman, and explained the situation. They wished the lawyer to apply for bail, and to undertake their defence.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Robart, "that the Magistrate cannot admit you to bail. You see, this is a capital charge. And by the time your application for bail reaches Capetown for presentation to the Supreme Court, your trial will have

begun in Beaufort West. The Circuit Court sits there in about three weeks' time. The best plan will be to try and hurry on the preliminary hearing before the Magistrate here, otherwise we may be too late for the ensuing Circuit Court, which would mean another six months' delay."

This was a whacking blow to all the men, who had promised their families they would get bailed out and return to their homes at once. Their incarceration would cause serious inconvenience, as some of the women left alone on the farms knew nothing whatsoever of the management of stock.

In the days before the establishment of the telegraph and railway, communication between the Karroo and Capetown was very slow, and the whole distance of five hundred miles had to be done by post cart.

"How is it that you were brought to Tukie's yard instead of being taken straight to gaol?" asked Mr. Robart.

"We came in our own carts, and asked the police to bring us here first so that we could put our horses into Tukie's care," explained Brandt. "And whilst we were here we took the opportunity of seeing you, thinking we should be admitted to bail. If, as you say, it will take some weeks before we can be liberated, it is going to be very awkward indeed. I hope that the trial will not be delayed beyond the ensuing Circuit Court?"

"The time is very short" said the lawyer, "but we can apply for bail before the Circuit Judge should your trial be put off to the following Circuit."

The police-officer clattered in, saying that it was time to proceed to the gaol, and the downcast little party rose in readiness to go. Mr. Robart promised to look them up later on, to take their statements and prepare their defence.

Tukie, in the meantime, had not been idle. He dashed about the town like a lunatic, spreading the news of the arrest of Brandt and his friends, and collected a number of the wealthiest inhabitants to sign the bail bond.

Consequently when the party marched out of Tukie's yard quite a crowd had gathered outside the gate. Everyone was wildly excited and the utmost indignation was expressed at the detention of the farmers for the shooting of such scum of the earth as Bushmen, a pestilence to any country.

The attitude of the Government in taking active steps in a matter so palpably to the benefit of the whole community was loudly condemned, and many declared that, should the men be convicted, it would cause a general uprising among the Boers, who would probably storm the gaol and liberate the prisoners.

On their arrival at the Court House Brandt and his men received quite an ovation from the concourse gathered there to cheer them up in their unfortunate position.

"Don't worry, Oom Jan," shouted a young Boer. "Nothing will happen to you. We guarantee that, on our honour."

"If this is the reward we Boers get for making the Karroo habitable we must sing a different song!" cried another.

“ I am sorry for the informer—the swine dog !
Who is he ? ”

These sentences and questionings could be heard on every side as the crowd jostled round the police guard.

At last, Brandt, holding up his hand for silence, spoke.

“ My friends, we thank you all very sincerely for your kind demonstration of sympathy, but I earnestly request you to on no account do anything rash, as that will only complicate matters for us. Please be natural in your behaviour. We fully understand and share your indignation, but the way to argue with the Government is not with riotous words and behaviour, but by relying on the justice of the Crown.”

“ And in the meantime you will all be hanged ! ” interrupted some one.

Brandt smiled. “ Almachte ! No, my friend, you are mistaken. No judge ever hangs a man. It will be you, my countrymen, who will sit in judgment over us as jurors. Let there be order and quietness now until the trial. Use your common sense.”

“ Verdict—Not Guilty ! ” shouted a bearded man from the rear.

The chief constable, who had come out during Brandt’s address, and had silently witnessed the scene, now ordered his guard to march the prisoners into gaol.

This gave rise to a fresh outburst of indignation from the crowd, some of whom tendered bail in any amount the Magistrate liked to fix. The

constable began to show annoyance at the interference, and injudiciously made an unguarded remark, reflecting upon the want of education in the Karroo Boer.

Immediately a young man pushing through the mob with clenched fist ranged right up to the officer, whom he would undoubtedly have struck had not Brandt quickly interposed.

"Be calm, my young friend," said the farmer, "be calm, and go back."

Catching Brandt's keen eyes the youth hesitated:

"Will you take an insult like that from a verdomed rooinek?"

"Certainly—when it comes from a man like that!"

The chief constable winced under the sting of Brandt's contemptuous remark, and might have replied to it had not Brandt continued to look him straight in the eyes.

Knowing the Boer nature very well, the overbearing officer subsided, and turning, strode into his private room.

The town was all buzz and excitement. Mr. Robart interviewed the accused in gaol, and read over to them the affidavits upon which they were arrested. Before the day was over everybody knew that the late Andries Witte and his servant Oukop were the chief informers.

Witte did not in any way connect the men arrested with the crime. His affidavit simply stated that he was coerced by one Friedenthal to raid the neighbouring cattle farms, that he had done so, aided by a number of Bushmen, who collected the cattle, and drove them across the boundary of the Colony,

where they were handed over by his servant Oukop to Friedenthal, on receipt of twenty ryksdaalders per head. He added that he was under the influence of Friedenthal, to whom he owed large sums of money, and in fear of ruin. In making this confession of guilt it was his object to break away from a life of crime, and obtain the protection of the law.

Witte had been promised immunity from prosecution if he could produce evidence that would convict the gang of thieves who from time to time made predatory excursions through the district, an undertaking he intended to fulfil on his return from his father-in-law's funeral.

During his absence the police visited his farm and interviewed the servants. None except Oukop knew anything of what had transpired, and it required a large amount of persuasion and assurances that he would be called as a Crown witness before the faithful Hottentot could be brought to say anything which might in any way implicate his master. Indeed, he only complied when convinced that Witte would not suffer by the disclosures.

When at last Oukop was induced to speak he gave particulars of a series of thefts and swindles in which his master had taken part, under compulsion from Friedenthal, who seemed to Oukop to possess some peculiar and secret power over the strong-minded Witte.

Oukop faithfully described the last raid, and told the story of the massacre in detail, mentioning the names of Brandt and all those who were with him. Oukop had recognised the Boers easily, as he hid

in a near-by bush with Friedenthal, who was waiting at the appointed spot to receive the cattle.

He gave the names of some of the killed as well as those of some other Bushmen who saw the whole affair from afar, and these last he undertook to produce as Crown witnesses.

It was on this affidavit that Brandt and the others were arrested.

CHAPTER XVIII

TUKIE MAKES A COUNTER-MOVE

WHEN Gijs realised that he was arrested and would be taken to town under escort like a criminal, there to be put on his trial, feelings of rebellion and resentment surged over his bewildered mind. Brandt, seeing that anger was taking possession of the young man, whispered a timely warning to be calm and say nothing. Gijs with a look of gratitude grasped the hand of his friend's father.

The police, who were all men well known to the farmers of the district, performed their disagreeable task as kindly as possible, being, indeed, in sympathy with the men whom duty obliged them to arrest. The sergeant, consulting his watch, told Gijs that he would allow an hour's grace, which would give him ample time to make the necessary arrangements for the carrying on of the farm.

Brandt entered the house to see his son and confer with Tante Let and Nettie. The rugged old Boer was terribly distressed to find Wijnand quite unable to recognise any one. The poor fellow was in a high fever, as, with his fingers plucking at the bedclothes, he talked excitedly and incoherently.

Tante Let, standing at the bedside, extended her hand to Brandt with a sad smile of welcome and sympathy.

"I am glad you have come, Neef Jan," she said. "I am afraid your boy is sadly injured."

"Do you think there is any danger, Nicht Let?" the old farmer spoke thickly.

Tante Let explained as well as she could how matters stood with Wijnand, and did her best to reassure the anxious parent.

"I have tried everything I could think of to bring down the fever, but it remains the same, and I fear it may become worse during the day. I have sent for your wife, and I hope she will be here soon. I wonder you did not meet my messenger, Neef Jan."

Brandt told her that the police had come to his farm first, and then had ridden on, taking him with them to the Du Plessis homestead.

The old man stood looking down on his son, stroking his long black beard the while. Troubles seemed to be falling on him thick and fast, and the distress he felt showed itself plainly on his fine old face. He could see that Tante Let was most seriously concerned and was herself looking poorly, having only recently got up from a sick-bed.

Brandt felt that he ought to say something to reassure her concerning the arrest of her son. He was in an unenviable predicament, and did not quite know how to begin. In casting about for what to say he tugged furiously at his coarse beard, until Tante Let, noticing his perplexity and hesitation, and understanding how much the old man had to

worry him, said, gently, " Tell me, Neef Jan, what is amiss ? You do not think this charge will prove a serious one, do you ? " Her kind eyes filled with tears.

" I cannot say, Nicht Let. It is more unpleasant than serious, I think," Brandt shook his head. " We did wrong, no doubt, in the eyes of the law in shooting the Bushmen who murdered our children, and we shall have to answer for it."

" I expected all along that there would be trouble. It was stupid of Gijs to pick up the little Bushmen he found in the Karroo."

Tante Let sat down heavily, and throwing her apron over her head rocked to and fro in her distress.

" Gijs acted unthinkingly, and did what he could to make amends. Do not let us blame him," Brandt spoke kindly.

" It was the beginning of the trouble, Neef Jan. Since then feelings of revenge have hastened events. What says the Book ? ' Vengeance is mine ! I will repay ! ' It is a judgment on us all."

" Well, we have to be tried for shooting the Bushmen. Heaven alone knows where the authorities got their information from. Who could have informed against us ? " Brandt paused, as he seemed to run over in his mind the possibility of any neighbour turning traitor. " I wish I knew who the man was who was with the Bushmen, and escaped us."

" It matters little. You will know when they try you ? " moaned the old woman.

" There is no need to be so concerned on our account, Tante Let. It is usual in these matters

for the Government to make some show of investigation. It is a complete farce, and invariably ends in smoke, as our trial will."

Brandt then told her that he had sent to Van der Vyver and asked him to visit Sterkfontein daily to assist her on the farm.

Tante Let, who was doing her best to be calm and composed, broke down completely and wept bitterly as she thought of her only son being under arrest for murder, and taken to town under police escort as a criminal.

Brandt was inured to all manner of hardship and could look trouble in the face and deal with it manfully, but a woman in tears always overpowered him. It made him feel helpless.

He crossed over to the stout figure hunched up in her chair, and, placing his great hand on her shoulder, tried to speak, but he could not trust himself to utter a word, and after looking despairingly at his son, who was now breathing heavily in an uneasy slumber, the Boer left the room quietly. He had to find Gijs and discuss and arrange numberless domestic affairs ere the farmers left for gaol.

Gijs and the rest were outside on the stoep, discussing the situation in low tones. The police stood at some distance, or walked up and down, and now and again made a pretence of inspecting some farm implement. They wished to give their prisoners freedom of opportunity to talk over the position in which they found themselves. Matters were complicated by reason of Wijnand's accident, and the fact that nearly every man in the immediate

vicinity of Sterkfontein was under arrest. Many families would be left helpless and unprotected—the reliance to be placed on native servants was not worth counting.

Each farmer found consolation in the thought that as soon as they arrived in town they would be admitted to bail, and that the moment the preliminary hearing of their case was over they could hurry back to their homesteads.

Gijs dreaded the parting from his mother ; the idea of leaving her under such circumstances was extremely distressing. His mother and Nettie comprised his whole world, and to part from them when they were in need of his help was a most acute trial to his feelings.

He felt keenly, too, about Wijnand, and determined to try and better things for him. Walking over to where the police officers were grouped together he addressed the sergeant and commenced to explain that if they took him, Gijs, away, there would only be two women left on the farm. He told of Nettie's journey to town for a doctor, and of the adventures she and Wijnand passed through—adventures which resulted in the disastrous accident—and dwelt on the fact that there was reason to fear the worst. He spoke feelingly of the unprotected state and total helplessness of his mother, and begged the officer to leave him behind.

The sergeant of police listened to the pleading attentively. He could see that the young man was in deadly earnest and spoke the truth.

“ What you ask, young man, is beyond my power to grant. I have absolutely no say in the matter

at all, and have to do my duty, however repugnant it may be."

"I do not mean that I desire you to set me free from arrest. I ask you to leave me behind for a time, and I will guarantee my appearance when I am required. This would enable me to make proper arrangements, and I can assure you I am not the man to run away from my trial—no matter what the charge may be against me."

"I have no doubt on the matter, but you ask an impossibility. Believe me, I should grant your request this instant had I the power to do so."

Gijs could see that the stalwart officer spoke feelingly and that he meant what he said.

"But consider the consequences! My helpless friend at death's door, and these unprotected women with no aid but that of treacherous natives."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders, and made no reply.

"Surely if the facts are explained you would be exonerated from all blame," pursued Gijs. "Will the law expose all these people to great danger in order to find out whether somebody has committed a murder? It cannot be!"

"You make it very hard for me, young man. If I were to fall in with your wishes it would mean not only dismissal but a charge of complicity in the crime." The officer walked away and then suddenly turned round again and strode up to Gijs.

"Although I cannot release any of you you can tell your friend Brandt that, if it will make things any easier, I am willing to stop here for a time, a

whole day if necessary. At any rate sufficiently long to enable you to send to your neighbours for assistance."

Gijs returned to his friends to relate his interview with the police. They had all gone indoors, where Tante Let, in spite of her grief, had prepared breakfast. But Gijs had no appetite at all, and went into his mother's room to talk matters over with her, walking in without ceremony and closing the door behind him. Throwing his arms round her neck he kissed her tenderly, as he tried to cheer her by referring to their predicament as a huge joke, and by putting the comic side of the affair before her. But Tante Let's mood remained unchanged, though she stroked his face and told him he was a good boy for endeavouring to comfort her.

He told her that there was no immediate hurry. The police were quite willing to remain awhile, and that he would see that help of some sort was available before he left the farm.

They were still discussing matters when the rumbling of wheels and the barking of dogs was heard outside, at which welcome sound both Gijs and Brandt rushed out, thinking that it must be Mrs. Brandt. It was not, however; Doctor Hanau stepped from the cart.

When he saw so many people collected at the homestead he became quite concerned, assuming that Tante Let's illness had taken a serious turn, until Gijs explained the situation, and expressed his fears lest the shock of the arrest should seriously injure his mother's health.

The doctor was amazed to hear of the wholesale

detention, but he made little comment. Every one came forward to greet him with the customary hand-shake, and as soon as this solemn rite was over, he took up his handbag and walked into the house.

It was a great relief to Tante Let to see Doctor Hanau come into her bedroom, for she held him in high esteem, having assisted him in many sick rooms. She had long since come to respect him for his capabilities as a doctor, and for his utter unselfishness and gentleness towards suffering humanity.

Doctor Hanau fully reciprocated Tante Let's regard, and always called the old Boer lady "a mother in Israel." Very often, when he was too busy to attend a summons, he would advise that Tante Let be called in. "She is as good as a doctor," he would say, "and in some cases far better."

Whilst Doctor Hanau was busy examining the patient Mrs. Brandt arrived, bringing Mrs. Van der Vyver with her.

Both looked wan and miserable, and when Mrs. Brandt met her husband she burst out crying and clung to him in her grief. What with her son ill away from home, and her husband arrested, she had about as much as any woman could bear. Everybody sympathised with her. The news that Doctor Hanau had arrived and was attending to Wijnand comforted her a little, and she followed her husband into the house.

It was some time before the doctor emerged from Wijnand's room to report progress to the anxious group outside.

"Tante Let is all right. She is a tower of strength in time of trouble." The doctor paused to light his pipe. "She is one in a thousand, one in a thousand. As long as Wijnand is ill she will nurse him. I cannot say definitely yet what is wrong with Wijnand. He is still sleeping and must on no account be wakened, but his temperature is abnormally high. His injury is undoubtedly grave, and the contused condition of the bruise makes it impossible for me thoroughly to diagnose its extent. Four ribs appear to be fractured—compound fractures, I fear, and from the fact that he expectorates blood one surmises that there is internal complication. The high fever is the result of the exposure, and he experiences great difficulty in breathing."

"I am afraid that the news of our arrest will have a bad effect on him," said Brandt.

"I have given strict orders that he is not to be told. Unfortunately the police will not consent to leave one of you behind, but as you are able to give bail to any amount I suggest that you proceed to town at once, which will enable you to be back in your homes by to-morrow night. If I find it necessary I will remain here until you return."

"I shall never forget your kindness!" said Gijs, fervently, grasping the old doctor's hand.

Doctor Hanau could not help smiling.

"You would do the same for me under similar circumstances, I suppose, wouldn't you?"

Gijs went to tell his mother of the doctor's promise. He knew it would be a great comfort to her and Mrs. Brandt.

Arrangements were then made for setting out

immediately, and it was decided, after a consultation with the police-sergeant, to stay the night at Osfontein, in order to get into town early in the morning, and do away with the necessity of spending a night in gaol. Tante Let had a hamper ready packed with all sorts of provisions for the road, and the party made ready to start. Had it not been for the presence of Doctor Hanau the parting would have been sad indeed. As it was he treated the whole matter lightly, and by doing so cheered up Tante Let mightily. When Brandt kissed her—all her friends kissed her on coming and going—she even ventured on a little pleasantry.

“I am glad you are arrested too, Neef Jan.”

“You astonish me, Nicht Let. I thought you were sorry for me.”

“I should have been much sorrier had you not been one of the prisoners. I know now that they will be guided and advised by a wise man.”

“Now, now,” interrupted Doctor Hanau. “If you flatter him like this, he will become so conceited that he will make a mess of things.”

“Don’t be jealous, doctor. I’ll flatter you by keeping you here as a substitute for Neef Jan until he returns.”

It was by no means a pleasant journey to the men, who grew more and more gloomy as their thoughts dwelt on their families left upon the various homesteads in so unprotected a condition.

Brandt began to lecture his fellow-prisoners as they rode along. He warned them not to make any sort of statement to the police or to refer to the case in any way. Very often it happened that but

for some unguarded words dropped by a prisoner a conviction would never have been effected.

The average magistrate of the Karroo at that time believed a policeman's word against all comers, and when once his evidence was given no statement by the accused was listened to for a moment. It was an accepted idea that all accused persons lied to get out of their trouble, and that the police and their witnesses were entirely disinterested.

Brandt had often sat on the jury in Circuit Court trials, and being naturally observant and thoughtful, had acquired quite a decent smattering of common-sense law. A legal absurdity jarred upon him in much the same manner as a discordant note violates the sense of harmony in music lovers. Gifted with clear insight and a keen perception, Brandt was respected and looked up to by all who knew him, and being irreproachable in his dealings, was trusted to lead and advise on all matters of importance.

He analysed the case in minute detail, and enlarged upon the various aspects of it, until he felt certain that his companions understood the position thoroughly.

"If it were purely a case of murder out of revenge for the death of our children, the position would be quite different to my mind, but what we did was absolutely necessary for the welfare of the whole Colony. Sooner or later the Government would have had to do it if the Karroo is to be made habitable. These Bushmen had stolen our cattle and resisted with force our endeavours to recover them. Our arrest and trial for murder is the best possible thing

that could happen, for it will draw attention to our cause.

"If I mistake not no jury will convict us even if the case should be proved; for the simple reason that it would be impossible to empanel nine men without including in their number several who have undergone the same hardships as we have, and most likely have themselves at some time or another shot, or hunted, marauding Bushmen. The moment we are discharged, every Boer will consider himself licensed to exterminate offending Bushmen, and the Government having done their duty, and failed to obtain a conviction, will, in their own interest, turn a blind eye to the Karroo, well knowing that we are doing their dirty work of scrubbing it clean."

So absorbed were the men in their discussion that the minutes passed unheeded, and when towards evening they arrived at Osfontein, they could hardly realise that so great a distance had been traversed, in what appeared to be so short a time.

Classen's consternation was great when he learned that Brandt and his friends were under arrest, and were being marched off as prisoners to gaol. He indulged in strong expressions of disapproval at the Government's action in arresting men for doing that which sooner or later the Colony would have to undertake at great expenditure to the Treasury. He was going on to say much more, when it suddenly dawned upon him that he had received a summons to serve on the jury at the ensuing Circuit Court. For a moment he became confused, not knowing

what construction might be put on his action in receiving these men at his house. Taking Brandt aside he explained the situation to him.

"Then don't receive us," replied Brandt smiling. "The police will require you to shelter us; and we will make ourselves at home."

"Please do, Oom Jan, but in fairness you will have to challenge me as a juror."

"In fairness I will do nothing of the sort. It would be a bad principle to help the Crown against ourselves."

Classen's sudden legal rectitude contrasted so oddly with his language of a moment ago, that Brandt could not help laughing outright.

"Don't let our being here worry you, and don't discuss the matter in the presence of the police."

Classens felt reassured as the sergeant explained the case to him. He received his guests with enthusiastic hospitality, making no distinction between the men and their guards, and, on the following morning, could not resist accompanying them to the town, there to render such assistance as lay in his power.

When it became known that the men could not be admitted to bail, but had to await in gaol their further trial, he busied himself in getting various families to send food and refreshments to the prison, so that the accused would not have to live upon the usual rough fare.

The news soon spread from farm to farm, and towards evening many of the neighbouring Boers came into town to satisfy their curiosity.

The gloom cast over Victoria West by the flood

was almost forgotten in this greater excitement, for the coming trial was of universal importance to all dwellers in the Karroo.

Many declared that, if the men were convicted, there would be a great trek from the Karroo northward, and the Government would be left to do the work of clearing out the Bushmen. The great interest evinced was mainly due to the fact that there was hardly a Boer who had not, at some time or other, sustained loss from the Bushmen, and all regarded them as vermin to be stamped out.

Tukie's shop was crowded with angry excited Boers talking and gesticulating wildly, most of whom had occasion to visit Tukie's little back store to calm their feelings (so they said) with a glass of the little Jew's special brand of soothing syrup.

Tukie took no great part in the conversation, for the general consensus of opinion was that the man Friedenthal should be lynched as the chief instigator of the thefts which led to the murder of the two white boys: but he did a considerable amount of thinking as he quietly served a number of customers, who, under the excitement of drink and argument, bought things recklessly.

Soon after closing his store that night, Tukie sauntered out in the direction of the native location, with the pretext of looking for one of his store-boys who had left without delivering some parcels.

The boy could not be found, but Tukie stumbled against Oukop, and making sure that no one was watching, the little Jew spoke a few words to him quietly, and immediately returned by another way to his store.

He went into his office and had just lit a shaded candle after carefully pulling down the blinds, when there was a knock and Oukop came in.

Tukie locked the door and told his visitor to be seated on a box. He himself remained standing, being altogether too agitated to keep still.

"I was looking for you, and am glad I found you. What I wish to tell you must be told at once. What you think?" and Tukie looked meaningly into the Hottentot's face.

"What is it, Baas Tukie?" asked Oukop, uneasily.

"You know your master and I were great friends? He always dealt with me, and you, also, have spent all your money in my store. I want to do you a good turn. What you think?"

Oukop made no reply, but sat still, huddled up in his blanket, calmly awaiting what might be coming.

"You know there were many Boers in town to-day and they were very angry. My shop was full of them, and I heard what they said. That is why I hunted you out. What you think?"

Tukie became dramatically cautious and looked in every corner of the room, as though fearing he had some hidden listener. Then lowering his voice and coming nearer he said solemnly:

"They have decided to shoot you if you give evidence to-morrow in that case. What you think, Oukop? I may as well tell you some of them have planned to shoot you to-night, if they come across you."

Tukie appeared in such deadly earnest that

Oukop could not help believing him. Still, he preserved the impassive calm so characteristic of a native.

"They know that you are to give evidence to-morrow, and that you have brought some Bushmen with you to testify as well. Besides, they connect you with the raids on their cattle and the murder of their children. You know what that means? What you think? It means they will kill you, Oukop."

Tukie spread out his hands as he said this, palms down. Oukop began to reflect that however much the Crown might promise him safety as Queen's witness, he would never be able to explain his connection with the raid to the satisfaction of the infuriated Boers, and under such circumstances his life would be in danger every moment. After pondering a little he said :

"I go to the police, Baas Tukie. I have done nothing wrong and I ask for protection in the town, and when my evidence is given I will ask the Magistrate to give me an escort out of the district."

Tukie threw up his hands in horror at this suggestion.

"No, Oukop, not that ! It would ruin me completely, for you will be made to say who warned you, and then the Boers will tear me to pieces. No, that will never do. What you think? Surely you would not injure me for having got you out of danger. What you think?" Tukie's voice trembled with emotion, and his face expressed unmistakable signs of fear.

"I did not think of that, Baas Tukie. What else can I do?"

"I have thought seriously about the matter, and see but one way out of the difficulty. You must clear out entirely and never be found. What you think! If you run away and take the Bushmen with you, there will be no evidence against Friedenthal—I mean Brandt and the others!" said Tukie, suddenly correcting himself. "The Boers will then think you wished to befriend them and will stand by you should any of them meet you again. What you think?"

"The police will track me, Baas, and then it will go hard with me," said Oukop, meditatively.

"They cannot track a goat, much less a Hottentot like you. You need have no fear of that. Besides, I shall so praise you up for refusing to give evidence that any Boer knowing your whereabouts will put the police on the wrong track. What you think? Of course you must go right across the Orange River, and stop there for a few years until everything is forgotten."

Tukie saw that he was gaining Oukop over and thought it time to play his trump card. Before the Hottentot could reply he continued: "I knew, Oukop, that you would be thankful for my warning, and I had to give it as you and your master have done a lot for me, so don't delay a moment. You won't be missed before ten o'clock to-morrow. You have to travel a long way, but I have arranged for that, too. What you think?" Tukie beamed upon Oukop as he took from a drawer in his office table a small bag of silver coins.

"Here is twenty pounds, all in silver, so as to raise no suspicion in case you have to pay for food along

the road. Take it as a gift from a friend, and if you come into the shop now you will have what clothes you require and a pair of veldschoens. What you think ? ”

Tukie sat rubbing his hands and looking happy again. Whatever fears and doubts Oukop had cherished vanished at the sight of so much money and the prospect of new clothes. He got up and took the money.

“ I was afraid you were not straight, Baas Tukie, but now I see that you are a friend, and mean well. Otherwise you would not give me money to help me get away.”

He snatched Tukie’s hand and brought it to his lips in real native fashion to express his gratitude. Then, looking the Jew straight in the eyes, he continued, “ Baas, this old Hottentot thanks you and promises you that the police may hunt until they are grey but they will never again hear of Oukop or the three Bushmen.”

Tukie felt like embracing Oukop. He knew that his partner would be a free man again almost at once. Without further ado, he led the way into the shop, where he pressed all sorts of gifts upon the Hottentot, who was not slow in availing himself of an opportunity to enrich himself at no cost whatever.

Tukie made him take so many articles to hand over to the Bushmen as a bribe to persuade them to fall in with the artfully laid plan, that at last Oukop found the parcel growing beyond his power of lifting. Tukie solved that difficulty by offering to carry some of the goods himself until they

found the Bushmen, when the burden would be divided.

For his peace of mind he wished to see them leave, and he did not quit Oukop's side until the Hottentot and the Bushmen were fairly on the road.

The night was dark and the town asleep—there was no difficulty in escaping observation in going or coming.

When Tukie re-entered his shop he found Oukop's old hat and shoes which he had discarded for the new ones, lying there. He looked at them for a time and then began to talk to himself: "Suppose the police overtake them, and find my things upon them, and the old hat and shoes here! Where should I be then! But they won't! Oukop is no fool where it is a question of his own skin. Still, there is no knowing. These natives will tell any lies to get out of trouble."

He thought awhile. At last an idea struck him.

"It is better to be on the safe side," he said, aloud.

Going into his back yard, he returned with a small crowbar, and after peering cautiously all round his building to make sure he was quite alone, he began to loosen the bricks around the shop window from the outside.

He worked carefully and laboriously, until he had broken a hole through the wall large enough to admit a man. Inside the store he pulled things about, disarranged several articles, and left Oukop's headgear and old shoes lying about. Surveying his work with satisfaction, he muttered to himself:

“ To-morrow Oukop will be wanted for shopbreaking and theft, and if caught, his story will not be believed. What you think? Won't Friedenthal laugh when I tell him! What fools these lawyers and magistrates are! What you think?”

CHAPTER XIX AND LAST

‘ I COME ! ’

TUKIE was in bed the following morning when his store-boy rushed in to rouse him with the news that the shop had been broken into and rifled during the night.

With a tremendous show of excitement the cunning little Jew jumped up and only half dressed himself in his feverish anxiety to ascertain how much damage had been done.

A few early risers were soon on the scene, examining the hole in the wall, and making guesses as to the identity of the burglars. Tukie raved and swore vengeance against the thief, declaring that he would leave no stone unturned until the wretch was found and brought to justice.

On entering his shop he became angrier and angrier as he enumerated the various things that were undoubtedly missing, and found merely an old hat and a pair of worn veldschoens to replace the losses. He despatched his store-boy to fetch the police, but it was fully an hour before they turned up, and by that time so many people had collected that all traces of thieves had been practically obliterated. Very solemnly, however, and with due formalities, the sergeant carried off the hat and veldschoens to the Charge Office.

Farmers were coming into town in large numbers to be present at the hearing of the Bushmen case that morning, and soon Tukie's store—the general meeting-place—was crammed. People went there to meet others, to discuss the gossip of the day, and particularly to get a little free refreshment from the back room. They were not pressed to purchase anything, merely to taste something, and it very seldom happened that, after a visit to Tukie's parlour, a farmer escaped without adding to his account. If after two or three such calls a customer refrained from purchasing anything, Tukie that night, on entering up his sales, blamed himself mercilessly for his wretched memory in forgetting what that particular Boer had bought, settling the matter by putting down in the yearly bill some article or other which he knew would never be queried.

By the time the Magistrate was ready to take his seat on the Bench quite a large crowd had collected in court. The accused men had been brought over from gaol and were occupied in the waiting-room. Mr. Robart was with them, going over various items in the indictment. Members of the police force hurried to and fro through the town and native location, returning occasionally to make reports to their Chief, who looked concerned and worried.

It was already past the usual hour for the opening of the court. The waiting crowd was getting impatient. Every available seat was occupied, and many people had to content themselves with insufficient standing-room.

Mr. Robart fidgetted, having already sent word to the prosecutor that he was ready and waiting—all to no purpose. Another hour dragged by ere the Magistrate entered from a side-door.

A policeman in a loud voice shouted “ Silence ! ” and the crowd rose to pay the customary mark of respect due to a representative of Her Majesty. His Worship made a stiff, perfunctory bow in acknowledgment and sat down, nodding to the prosecutor as a sign that the proceedings might commence.

In pompous tones the clerk of the court read out the names of Brandt and his men, and as each was called, the accused rose and took his stand behind Mr. Robart’s chair.

The Crown prosecutor then announced that he would be unable to proceed farther with the case that morning—the witnesses could not be found. He had four witnesses in town on the previous evening, and had warned them that their presence was required in court that morning. Not one of them had put in an appearance.

He mentioned the fact that the store of Mr. Tugendreich had been broken into during the night, and that an old hat and a pair of veldschoens had been found. These had been identified by the police as having belonged to one of the missing witnesses, one Oukop, a Hottentot.

Search had been made throughout the town, but the witnesses could not be found. The police suspected that Oukop had committed the crime of shopbreaking, and had decamped with the spoil, taking the Bushmen along with him. Under these

circumstances a long remand of the case was necessary, during which time every effort would be made to trace the basantees.

A thrill of excitement ran through the audience, who, up to that moment, did not know of the Hottentot's disappearance.

"You have brought these men before me and yet produce no witnesses," said his Worship, drily, "I cannot send them to gaol without hearing evidence against them."

"I can produce evidence of arrest, your Worship," said the prosecutor.

Mr. Robart submitted that mere evidence of arrest meant nothing at all. A prisoner could not be committed to gaol on evidence of arrest. And the prosecutor held out no real hope of being able to produce the missing witnesses. Supposing he never found them! Were the prisoners to be detained for an indefinite period on the off chance of the runaways being brought to book. He applied for the discharge of all the accused.

His Worship said they had not been arraigned as yet, and appeared before him on a preliminary hearing only. He could not order a discharge unless he was satisfied that the witnesses could not be found. He would take evidence of arrest in the meantime.

The sergeant who had apprehended the prisoners was called into the witness-box, and handed in the warrant upon which he acted, giving, at the same time, an account of each arrest as he made it.

"Did you warn the accused that any statements

made by them might be used in evidence against them ? " asked the Magistrate.

" Yes, your Worship. None of the men made any statement except Jan Brandt."

" What did he say ? "

" He said that the Government were setting a stone rolling which would gather a tremendous impetus before it came to rest."

" Anything else ? "

" No, your Worship. The men did not discuss the matter in my hearing."

As that was all the available evidence a discussion arose as to the length of time for which the case should be remanded. The prosecutor suggested a week, but Mr. Robart opposed, saying that as the witnesses were in town the previous evening they could not be far away. If they had fled the district then it might be months, or even years, before they could be traced. The accused could not be detained in gaol indefinitely.

After listening to arguments on both sides the Magistrate decided that two days would be a reasonable time in which to ascertain the whereabouts of witnesses, and he remanded the case accordingly.

When the crowd surged out of the court-house, there was general rejoicing. Every one knew that the running away of Oukop and the three Bushmen was the best thing that could have happened—the trial of Brandt and his party must now end in smoke. A whispered resolution was passed round among the Boer farmers to the effect that any one coming across Oukop would be

expected to give the Hottentot every chance to clear out of the Colony.

Tukie, who bemoaned his loss constantly, now declared that he gladly suffered for the sake of the accused farmers. He hoped that Oukop would run for a week without stopping. The Boers laughed and cheered the little Jew for his unselfishness, promising to support him in his business for so long as he chose to remain in the dorp and kept his back parlour going.

The two days slipped by. Brandt and his friends were loaded with all manner of luxuries by their many sympathisers, and had no lack of visitors in gaol.

The police endeavoured to trace the fugitive witnesses and employed native trackers who spored in all directions—to no purpose. One by one the searchers returned to report complete failure and claim payment for their services.

Punctual to time the Magistrate took his seat once more, and the prisoners ranged themselves behind their lawyer's chair.

Announcing that he had failed to elicit any information as to the whereabouts of the witnesses for the Crown the prosecutor said that he had no option but to withdraw the charge against the accused, including Friedenthal.

The Magistrate, making a note on his record, and almost without looking up, discharged the prisoners.

The crowd could hardly suppress their feelings until his Worship had left the bench, and no sooner was his back turned than tumultuous cheering broke

out. The men were surrounded and congratulated and thanked a thousand times over. Friedenthal, taking the opportunity the uproar offered, slipped away unnoticed.

The trial was over, a trial which, had it ended seriously, might have altered the history of South Africa. Every Boer knew that from thenceforward the Bushmen must steadily diminish as the whites spread inland. Every one saw in fancy the valleys, where few farmers had dared to venture, dotted with herds of peacefully browsing cattle. This would come, though it might be the Boers had yet to pay in blood for the security ensured to generations yet unborn.

As Doctor Hanau had not yet returned from Sterkfontein, Brant, Gijs and Du Plessis became very anxious, and made preparations for immediate departure.

The townspeople would not hear of any of the farmers leaving for their homes until they had attended a fête prepared by the rejoicing populace, who could not lionise the ex-prisoners sufficiently. Brandt and Gijs, however, were in no mood for merriment, and determined to slip away before the party commenced.

Tukie almost went mad with delight at the favourable ending, and liberally subscribed to the feast from the good things in his store. His little back room, too, was at the disposal of all and sundry who chose to patronise it. As a natural consequence the talk became loud and boisterous, but the police, who would hardly have dared to interfere, turned a deaf ear.

The conversation turned to Friedenthal, who, it had leaked out, was mainly responsible for the cattle raiding.

"Tukie, where is Friedenthal," shouted a black-bearded Boer. "Bring him here. I want him."

"How should I know what has become of the scoundrel?" flared Tukie, angrily. "What you think?"

"You ought to know. You are a Jew also."

"Yes, but not like that one," interposed Brandt. "Tukie is a jolly fine fellow, especially in times of trouble."

"Hurrah!" shouted a score of voices. "Three cheers for our Tukie!"

Every one yelled at the top of their voices, and some of the young bloods seized hold of the little storekeeper, raising him shoulder high. Tukie submitted with the best possible grace, being powerless to resist. The rough and tumble banter was all meant in good part, and the Jew took it so.

Within an hour from the time of release Gijs started on his homeward journey with Brandt and Du Plessis. The day was intensely hot, and as the cart was heavy the horses could not be pressed. All three men felt the tension of suspense—what was happening at Sterkfontein? They asked themselves the question over and over.

Gijs, as driver, was compelled to do the first part of the trip in short stages, and to the anxious travellers the waits seemed interminable. At last it became cool enough to allow of the horses going faster, and Gijs declared he would not outspan again before reaching home.

He deliberately drove at a quick pace past every homestead dotted along the road in order to escape having to recount everything that had happened in town. There were no newspapers circulating in the district at the time. Each outpost family depended upon the casual passer-by for information.

Just as night fell the anxious farmers reached Sterkfontein. They had done the whole distance from Victoria West with one pair of horses—a great feat of endurance.

As the cart drew up Tante Let and Van der Vyver came out of the house to welcome the men. Jantje and some native boys ran forward, but every one was strangely silent. Tante Let was weeping for joy, and could hardly reply to the anxious enquiries after Wijnand.

" The doctor and his mother are with him now. He is very ill. Doctor Hanau says the poor lad has developed pneumonia in an acute form, and will require the utmost care and attention. I am so glad to have you back, for we are all worn out with constant watching. I have hardly slept since you left. I don't know what I should have done without Doctor Hanau."

The men entered the house quietly. Brandt wanted to go at once to Wijnand, but Tante Let restrained him.

" Let me first ask the doctor whether you may go in. He has been calling for you often, and has wondered why you did not come to him. We could not tell him, of course, what had happened. If you go in unexpectedly the shock might prove very disturbing."

Tante Let returned almost at once, followed by the doctor and Mrs. Brandt, who, poor woman, wept bitterly at the sight of her husband, to whom she clung in her distress. In a low voice she asked the result of the trial, and her sad face brightened as Jan Brandt recounted the whole of the scenes.

Doctor Hanau endeavoured to assume a cheerful expression, but it was obvious, even to a casual observer, how intensely worried he was.

Explaining Wijnand's state to the anxious father he said that pneumonia had developed to an alarming extent. The broken ribs had penetrated the lungs, and he entertained the gravest fears. He thought it best to be candid and to warn them all. He hoped for a recovery, and Wijnand had youth and a good constitution in his favour.

"And every now and then he asked for you," sobbed Mrs. Brandt. "It was so terrible not to be able to explain why you could not come to him."

"Let me go to him now! I cannot wait longer," cried Brandt, his face working.

"Do not wake him if he is asleep," warned the doctor.

Softly Brandt and his wife tiptoed into the room, where they found Mrs. Van der Vyver and Mrs. Venter on duty.

Wijnand was asleep, and looking at the strong young fellow as he lay he appeared to be in the best of health. But for a slight flush on his sunburnt cheeks his complexion was quite normal. His father bent down and kissed the damp forehead

tenderly. A large tear fell on Wijnand's cheek, and almost immediately he opened his eyes. A faint smile crept over his face as he placed his left arm round Jan Brandt's neck, and kissed him. The simple old Boer was overcome now. He could not bear to see his son's sufferings.

" I am so glad you have come, dear father. I did so want to see you." Wijnand spoke in a hollow voice, and the effort set him coughing in a distressing manner.

Presently he became delirious once more, and wandered afar in his distraught mind: " We can cross all right—Hold up, ' Aasvogel '—Almachte ! the water is cold—Nettie, my dearest, are you all right ? We must drive on—Where is Gijs ?—You said father would come—There they are—with the cattle—ten Bushmen—shoot quickly—missed him—Tante Let, I must get up—father wants me."

At moments he would lie back perfectly still with his eyes closed, apparently asleep. Then raising himself suddenly he stared into a corner of the room.

" Nettie, Nettie ! " he whispered, " I love you ! Gijs, old man, we will fight fair for her."

Smiling and stretching out his arms he cried in joyous tones: " Nettie, my love, I am coming."

Brandt and his wife stood at the foot of the bed with the tears rolling down their cheeks. To them his words were a premonition of sad import.

Gijs and Nettie sat like statues in the dining-room. Neither could say a word, and when the Brandts came weeping from Wijnand's bedside, they

thought the worst had happened. Nettie buried her face in her hands and began to shake with subdued weeping; Gijs's face set like marble in an agony of grief and sorrow. Tante Let tried to revive hope by explaining that such delirious attacks were the natural course of the illness, and that they generally ended in a sound sleep from which the patient awoke refreshed and strengthened. She had no doubt but that Wijnand would presently rest quietly.

After a while Doctor Hanau came into the dining-room and said that he had administered a sleeping draught and that under its effect the patient lay calmed. Drumming his fingers on the table the kind old man said: "It is the injury that troubles me—I can do nothing for it. But if he sleeps well and his strength is maintained we may pull him through yet."

Tante Let laid the table with Nettie's help and served supper. With the exception of Van der Vyver nobody could manage to eat more than a mere scrap of anything.

Doctor Hanau went off to bed, arranging to be called should necessity arise. Tante Let suggested that Mrs. Brandt and Oom Jan should follow suit. Mrs. Du Plessis had come over for the past two nights to assist and relieve the watchers, and was expected at any moment. Nettie had decided to remain at the farm. She felt keenly that she was in a sense responsible for the sad accident to her lover, and she wished to do all that was possible to assist in the house.

"Mother," said Gijs, "may not Nettie and

I go into Wijnand's room—just to see him again? We will not speak or disturb him in any way.”

Without a word Tante Let led the way, beckoning them to follow. Wijnand's bed stood away from the wall and Gijs took up his position on one side, Nettie on the other. Thus they stood looking down at the unconscious form.

Who could analyse the thoughts that crowded the youthful minds of the sad pair as they gazed upon the face so dear to both of them! Nettie could scarcely refrain from sobbing aloud, and Gijs's heart turned to his boyhood and the many days he and Wijnand had spent together.

Softly as they came the two passed out of the room again. Neither spoke, but Gijs pressed the hand of the weeping girl comfortingly. Returning to the dining-room they sat on in silence until the arrival of Mrs. Du Plessis, whom they went out on to the stoep to welcome.

She was not surprised to see Gijs, but it was most welcome news to her to hear that the Bushmen case was over, and that her husband would return home on the following day.

As Mrs. Du Plessis went on duty for a portion of the night, Mrs. Van der Vyver gave up her vigil, and went out of the house to get a breath of fresh air. Finding Gijs and Nettie sitting on the stoep she questioned the young man about the events in town, for the case had not been mentioned in the sick-room, and she knew no more than the bare fact of their release. Very briefly Gijs told her all that had transpired, and, changing the subject as

soon as he could, turned to the overwhelming interest of Wijnand's illness.

"I am so sorry for him," said the good woman, feelingly. "I am most anxious, too. His wound is terribly swollen, and the fever never lessens. The coughing racks him, and he constantly brings up blood." She paused, looking keenly distressed, for, in common with every one who knew him, she loved Wijnand dearly. "He often asked me why you did not come, Gijs, and I had to invent all sorts of excuses, as we could not tell him anything of the arrest. After you had left him a few minutes ago I heard him mutter: 'He has come, my old friend.' Then: 'I thought I saw Nettie.'"

Tears rolled down Nettie's pale cheeks, and Gijs stared through a mist at the stars. Mrs. Van der Vyver, unable to trust herself to speak, turned away with a sigh.

For some time longer the two remained on the stoep, neither able to say anything, yet finding consolation in the other's presence. Towards midnight they tiptoed into the house again to find out how the patient fared.

The doctor was up, and busy in Wijnand's room, and Mrs. Du Plessis was hurrying to and fro from the kitchen with hot fomentations. Wijnand's breathing had become more laboured, and could be heard in all parts of the house. There was no need to enquire from any one how he was.

Gijs went outside again, for to hear Wijnand's painful fight for life was agony to him. In an effort to relieve his feelings he roamed aimlessly over the homestead, looking into the stables and kraals.

As he passed close to a native hut his attention was arrested by a curiously familiar moaning—where had he heard it before !

In a moment Jantje’s hand was on his arm, and the Hottentot endeavoured to lead his master back to the path.

“ What is the matter, Jantje ? Why aren’t your people asleep ? ”

“ Nothing is wrong, Baas Gijs. We were talking, and are now going to bed.”

“ I can hear some one moaning. Is any one ill ? ”

“ No, Baas, no. I think some one yawning—that is all. Good-night, Baas, good-night.”

Adroitly Jantje tried to dismiss the visitor, but at that moment a prolonged and painful cry sounded from inside the hut.

“ Jantje, why did you lie to me ? Some one is ill in there ! ” Gijs spoke sternly.

“ No, I did not lie. There is nobody sick. It is a little boy dreaming. You can safely go home, Baas. There is nothing wrong.”

As the Hottentot spoke Gijs determined to see for himself, and before he could be prevented was in the hut, striking a light.

There, creeping about the floor, was the native boy, Izaak, going through the same contortions that Gijs had witnessed before.

Holding his match in one hand until it flickered out, Gijs stared at the lad in terror. What calamity did the scene portend ? To the natives it meant death, and had he not himself proved that there was something in their superstition ?

Gijs stumbled from the hut feeling like a man

who has received his death sentence. He could not dismiss the thought that the same extraordinary warning had been given before his brother was murdered. Although he kept assuring himself that the whole thing was merely coincidence, and that no sensible person believed in such signs, the truth forced itself on his mind. Wijnand was dying.

Near the stoep he encountered Nettie, who had also heard the wailing. She asked him if anything was amiss, and Gijs made up a comforting story about a nightmare and a large indigestible supper.

Taking the girl's hand in his the young Boer whispered brokenly : " You know, don't you, how much we both love you, and that he has been my true friend all these years ! My heart is very sad."

He told her of their compact, and of their agreeing to abide by her choice without any thought of severing the lifelong friendship.

Nettie, strangely moved by her lover's simple words, realized how much she meant to these two faithful covenanters. So, absorbed in their thoughts, they walked up and down the stoep in the moonlight, oblivious of everything save for the occasional touch of sympathy conveyed by the pressure of hands.

It was almost daybreak when they went within to find the doctor sitting in the dining-room, looking worn and stern.

" I am afraid," he said, in answer to Nettie's inquiry, " he is beyond our help."

Just then Mrs. Venter hurried into the room.

" Doctor, I think the crisis is over. He speaks coherently. He is better, surely ? "

In a few moments the doctor reappeared, looking graver than ever. " He wants to see you both. Comply with any wish he may express. Life with him is only a matter of moments now."

When Gijs and Nettie entered the room they found Wijnand holding his father's hand, and looking almost himself. He looked quite well, as he smiled and spoke in his old familiar voice :

" I am going to leave you all, but you must not grieve for me. Something is for ever calling me. Don't grieve for me, because I am so happy ! " A strange, sweet smile lighted his eyes as he drew his mother's head down to the level of his lips and kissed her hair.

With a strength of which they did not deem him capable he raised himself in bed and extended his hand to each of the watchers in turn. As Gijs came to the bedside his dying friend motioned to Nettie to come near also. For a few seconds he lay holding their hands, and looking up at them with the old smile, he said,

" My dear Gijs, and my dear Nettie, both so precious to me. I want you to be happy together. Had I lived, our love for you, Nettie, might have severed the friendship Gijs and I have ever had for one another. Heaven steps in now—it is best so. Won't you love him, Nettie ? " Taking the girl's hand the dying man placed it in that of Gijs.

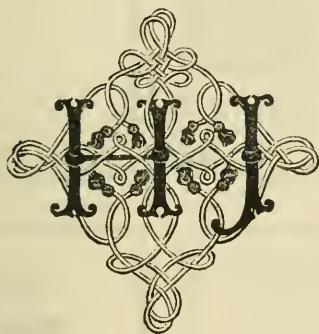
His head sank for a moment—he struggled for breath again. With an effort he drew Nettie nearer and kissed her on the lips.

" Gijs, Gijs ! " he cried, in a high, feverish voice, " Make her happy."

Smiling brightly he watched the dawn break over the Karroo.

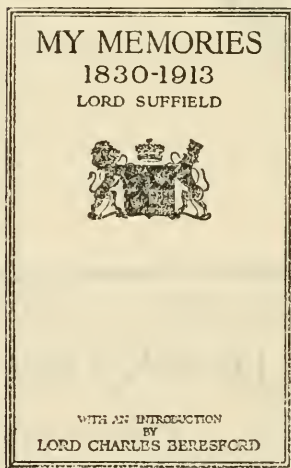
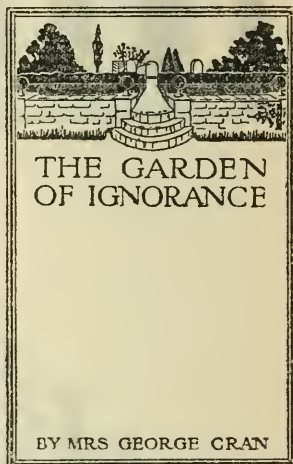
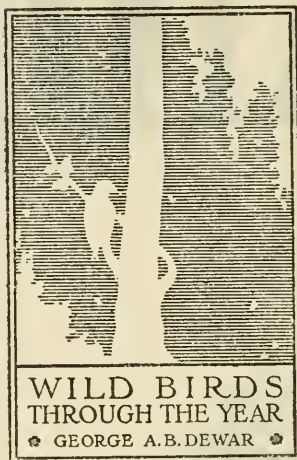
“ I come ! I come ! ” he cried, holding out his arms to the sun.

And in the midst of those who loved him Wijnand Brandt lay dead.



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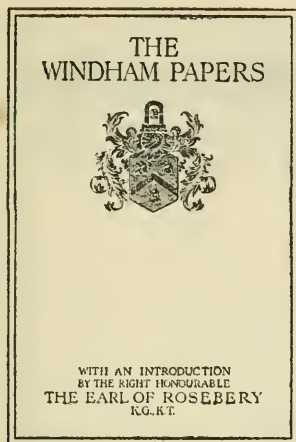
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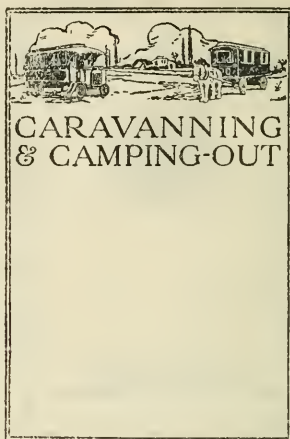
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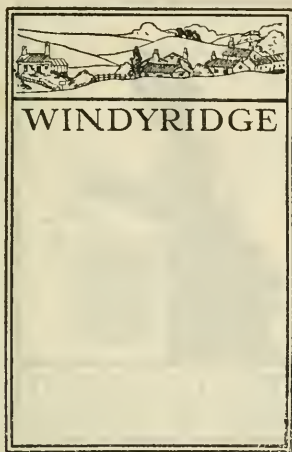
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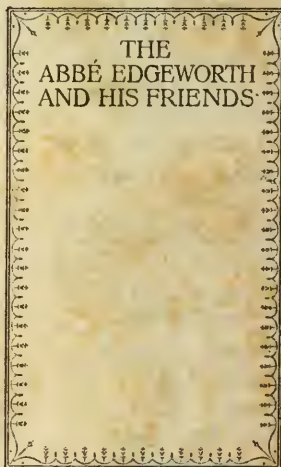
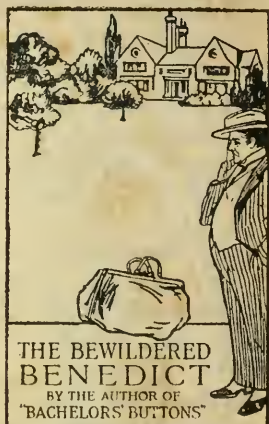
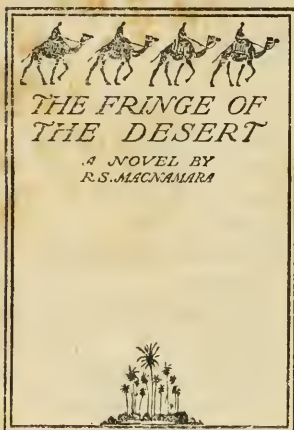
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